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Reclaiming Dependence: Personhood, Class and the Remaking of Labour in Post-Socialist Macedonia

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Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Sussex

September 2015

I hereby declare that this thesis, has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part, to this or another University for the award of any other degree.

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Summary

This thesis is primarily an anthropological and historical study of transformations of labour regimes in Macedonia within the context of a changing political economy. This process can largely be situated in the “transition” from a socialist to a market-based economic model; a process which was never only about transforming the “economic” but touched upon every intimate aspect of people’s lives. It is through these changes, and the reconceptualization of what work ought to be about, that we can explore larger questions of class identity, alienation, morality, personhood and the operations of power and social reproduction in contemporary Macedonian society. As such, this thesis is offered as a contribution to the traditional, yet, in the case of Macedonia, under-researched, themes of social and economic anthropology. My primary fieldsite and object of investigation, is the small township of Shtip, in eastern Macedonia, where I investigate the changing role and social status of industrial workers in the national economy, and the everyday working lives of garment labourers in one of Shtip’s largest garment factories.

The historical chapters of this thesis analyse the making of an industrial working class within socialist Yugoslavia, and the subsequent attempts at unmaking the values, social relations and forms of personhood, that grew up within the specifics of Yugoslav socialism. I approach “class” through the indeterminate interplay of social, cultural and economic factors, and highlight the enduring cultural importance of embedded, relational forms of personhood. As I move towards more current events, and particularly the ethnographic chapters, I focus more strongly on the responses of industrial workers to such changes. I deal not only with specific practices, but also with questions of the “imagination”, or how workers, experience, and reflect on these wider changes in ways that keep open the possibility of rearranging social relations at the workplace, and beyond. In doing do, I propose that struggles over the definition of personhood, rather than class conflict, are at the forefront of debates about what work ought to be about. Also, I suggest that the outcome of these struggles has not been to challenge subordination and social inequality in itself, but to challenge the specific kinds of inequality and subject categories introduced by the transition to a neoliberal market economy (Dunn 2004).

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Map 1: Macedonia and Shtip (Štip)



List of acronyms:

ALA	Associated Labour Act
ASNOM	Anti-Fascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Macedonia
BOAL	Basic Unit of Associated Labour
CPM	Communist Party of Macedonia
CPY	Communist Party of Yugoslavia
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMRO – DPMNU	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization - Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDUM	Social Democratic Union of Macedonia
SOE	Socially Owned Enterprise
USM	Union of Syndicates of Macedonia
WB	World Bank

Part I: Literature Review and Methodology

Chapter I: Labour Studies and Anthropology in Macedonia

1.1 Introduction: Anthropology in Macedonia

The spread of social and cultural anthropological research in Macedonia has been a relatively recent development. This is perhaps as it should be, given that Macedonia itself is a “recent” addition on the world map. Its first appearance as a unified political entity took place in 1945, as one of the six constituent republics of Socialist Yugoslavia; its second appearance in 1991, as it exited Yugoslavia to embark on the road of independence. As it turned out, it was the trials and tribulations that the country faced upon this road that suddenly attracted the attention of Western anthropologists and shaped their research interests¹. It is of little surprise then that the vast majority of the extensive anthropological research that has been generated over the past three decades by local and foreign anthropologists, has been centred on questions of ethno-national identity politics (see Brown 2003; Cowan & Brown 2000; Danforth 1995; Ellis 2003; Karakasidou 1997; Duijzings 1997; Janev 2011; Schwartz 1996; Trpeski 2013). Unlike in most other Eastern Bloc countries, researchers interested in Yugoslavia’s transition were justifiably less concerned with transformations in property rights and market encroachment, and more with the ethnic conflicts that defined the demise of the Yugoslav federation. Within a very brief time span, Yugoslavia had thoroughly lost its academic attraction as an economic experiment of worker self-management that intrigued sociologists and developmental economists from socialist and capitalist

¹ I do not wish to suggest that ethnographic research was entirely absent prior to Macedonia’s independence. The contributions of local and regional researchers during socialism have been well documented by Dimova and Risteski (2013), and Risteski (2011). Their work, however, has been developed within the evolutionary framework of a Victorian “scientific ethnology” that dominated ethnology departments in Yugoslavia and Macedonia well into the nineties, and have often served to perpetuate myths of national origins (see Bošković 2005). Publications by English and American trained anthropologists during this period are exhausted by a few scattered studies on social structure, ritual and kinship systems in north-western Macedonia, namely by Obrebski (1977; posthumously published paper based on fieldwork done in the 1930’s); and the more consistent work of Rheubottom (1976; 1980).

countries alike (see Horvat, Marković and Supek 1975; Bockman 2011: 100). Instead, it transformed into an export industry for studies of cultural interaction and conflict management; a topic of great interest in the dawning era of globalization and transnational politics.

In 1993, during the heat of the Bosnian conflict, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace decided to republish its 1914 report that investigated the historical roots of the Balkan wars of 1912-13, which suddenly brought to life ideas that very little had changed in the Balkans in the intervening 80 years (Todorova 1997: 4). Timeless historical animosities were once again seen to be resurfacing from beneath the thin veil of the socialist propaganda of brotherhood and unity. Post-independence Macedonia was not exempt from becoming the object of such myopic frameworks. Interethnic tensions were on the rise, especially after changes in the constitution in 1991 that sought to define Macedonians as the exclusive “constituent nation” and Albanians, who comprised a quarter of the population as a “minority” with a different set of rights and obligations (see Brown 2000: 129). In order to add legitimacy to the new state, a newly reinvigorated Macedonian national history sought to condense disparate events scattered over more than two millennia, into a single unified narrative. External relations with neighbouring Greece were soured by the dispute of the country’s name and flag, which was perceived in Greece as a direct claim on historical and national symbols celebrated as inalienably Greek (ibid: 124; Danforth 1993: 4). In the heat of events, the “Macedonian problem” appeared once more rooted in competing Balkan nationalities that, as Churchill once famously quipped, “produce more history than they can consume.”

Anthropologists were quick to respond to the task of challenging such simplistic models that took national identities for granted. In their edited volume on Macedonia, Cowan

and Brown (2000) for example approach the question of identity through the structural metaphor of inflection. They assert that whatever meaning or direction a signifier possesses cannot be extracted from variations in the isolated acts of its enunciation. Instead we must locate its positioning within the larger spatiotemporal context where inflection is determined by the opposition of signifiers within that context. Establishing the elusive meaning of utterances such as ‘Macedonia’ or ‘Macedonian’ would thus depend on locating where one is speaking from (the spatiotemporal trajectory) as well as to whom the utterance is directed. As the structural interplay of signifiers varies so does the context and meaning of seemingly identical utterances, thus creating a multiplicity of inflections that are often conflicting and volatile. What the authors aim to achieve by deconstructing such categories is to “unsettle assumptions of fixed, stable ethnic and national categories, and the constituencies defined by them” (Cowan & Brown 2000: 22). This also needs to be complemented by questions of power, and an analysis of who benefits (or loses) from the creation and reproduction of such essentialist categories. Similarly, for Danforth, the task of the anthropologist is to “dereify the nation, to deconstruct and expose nationalist myths of the nation waiting, Sleeping Beauty like, to be awakened from its slumber” (1995: 15). Brown’s (2003) historical ethnography of nation making in Macedonia follows up on this commitment. He examines the relationship between “national history, identity and politics” and particularly the dynamic but non-determining role of state in the making of this history (ibid: 21).

More recent publications have continued to build on the topic of identity politics though with an expanded focus that ties the national with other factors. The recent edited volume by de Munck and Risteski (2013) is thematically organized around the interconnection between symbols and practices and the conditions under which ethnic

identities become more or less ambiguous as they intersect with questions of gender, nationalism, religion and the environment. Ilka Thiessen's (2007) book "Waiting for Macedonia: Identity in a Changing World," for example, focuses on a group of young female engineers through which she explores how young people question and remake their identities at the crossroads of gender, nationality and class. She also raises some important questions regarding modernity, particularly by looking at the urban-rural conceptual divide, and various consumption activities and practices of reshaping the body through which distinctions of being "modern" or "European" are generated, often in relation to the ethnic Other (122). Through her work with Albanian families in Skopje, the capital of Macedonia, Neofotistos (2010) has examined the various ways in which derogatory ethnic slurs for Albanians, become co-opted and re-valued by Albanian men in order to create social distinctions that allow them to "make claims about the worth of themselves and other members of their ethno-national community" (ibid: 902).

Similarly, through her research with Albanian and Macedonian families in the north Macedonian town of Kumanovo, Rozita Dimova (2006; 2010) has explored some of the connections between ethnicity and class by analyzing changes in patterns of consumption. She suggests that the rise of ethno-national differences in Macedonia "need to be analyzed by stressing the rearticulation of class [and] ethnicity" within a changing political and economic climate (2010). One of the key sentiments she picked up at the outset of her research among the Macedonian families was an acute feeling of loss. The primary implication in this discourse was the loss of class privileges accumulated during the Yugoslav communist period when ethnic Macedonians occupied the vast majority of managerial and administrative positions, and enjoyed a comfortable state sponsored lifestyle.

Such studies have certainly accomplished the much needed task of broadening our understanding of the operations of identity politics in a society so deeply permeated by their dynamics. However, my own research will veer away from the emphasis placed on ethno-national “identity” as the most salient social marker in contemporary Macedonia. Not because I think it is irrelevant, but as Keith Brown (2010) has recently warned, because there lies a danger of their transformation into a class of “gatekeeping concepts” that relate all aspects of ethnographic knowledge in Macedonia back to the question of ethnic and national identity (see also Appadurai 1986: 357); to the expense of determinants that may prove to have very little to do with national belonging. In a play of metaphors, Brown has suggested that we might do well to analytically and methodologically “re-envisage the stuff of Macedonian ethnography as routes rather than roots and as constituted from transnational relations rather than contested national essence” (2010: 833). He juxtaposes two seemingly unconnected events: the death of a migrant from Macedonia on a sinking ship in Baltimore in 1907 and the deaths of two Macedonian contractors in Baghdad in 2004 at the hands of Islamic militants. What links the lives of these men separated by ninety-seven years and thousands of miles is that they all became “entangled in the workings of globalized labour regimes, shaped by the particular dynamics of empire” (ibid: 821). This example highlights the enduring significance of global flows of capital for the lives of ordinary Macedonians.

I find the focus on “labour regimes” particularly inspiring and believe it can offer fresh perspectives that can broaden our understanding of the social and cultural lives of people in a country that appears to be caught up in a state of permanent economic and political “transition”. The significance of global labour regimes, of course, does not have to be studied transnationally. After all, most people become “entangled” in the workings of global capital without the need to leave their respective places of origin,

and this has certainly been the case for most people in Macedonia who got caught up in the great neoliberal transformation. My particular interest in the question of labour arose from the under-researched, yet ever-present, public debates about the declining conditions of industrial work in Macedonia. The garment sector in particular has received by far the biggest amount of media attention. Reports dealing with the mistreatment of workers and violations of basic labour rights have become the most common associations with work in the industry. “Slavery”, “exploitation” and “feudalism” were but some of the disturbing labels that people regularly used to describe to me their perceptions and experiences of the garment industry. Most often, this discourse was accompanied by nostalgic narratives of bygone socialist times.

The overall ambient was one of declining fortunes and a worsening of living standards that almost appeared to roll back time. Dimova’s focus on the “loss” of privileges captures an important dimension, but one cannot avoid the feeling that it is essentially about the loss experienced by upper middle class Macedonians (the voices in her research are predominantly architects, economists, physicians etc.) After all, the vast majority of people during socialism did not enjoy the privileges of managerial or administrative positions. Also, not all those who did enjoy privileges during socialism lost out in the transition, nor does the discourse of “loss” necessarily bounce off the ethnic Other. The people I spent time with in Shtip spoke of a different kind of loss, in which the Other was usually the former socialist technocratic-managerial elite that became the new class of *nouveaux riches* industrialists. The emergence of this new class did not just signal the “loss” or transfer of material wealth from “workers to capitalists”, but a moral crisis that threatened the very integrity of the moral self. I will expand on this notion later on. Suffice it to say here that there are strong indications that questions of class, culture, power and personhood can be explored outside the confines of the

“ethnic” and that this exploration can yield, I hope, a new understanding of the social and cultural lives of ordinary Macedonians.

To follow up on this investigative shift, I believe that a research project that focuses on the everyday experiences of labour in and around the workplace can build on and contribute to the existing literature on Macedonia by engaging itself more widely with ethnographic studies of post-socialism and theories of labour, production and alienation. My thesis will focus on everyday experiences of “manufacturing consent” and negotiating change in the relationship between workers, employers and the state by looking at the garment industry. This involves the shaping of new conceptions of work through practice, but also on how labour figures in the historical imagination of people that have seen such practice take place under different political economies, such as Yugoslav socialism and post-independence free-market capitalism. What is the role of this socialist legacy in the ongoing transformations and operations of class, personhood, culture and power within the context of a changing political economy and the overall decline in the material and symbolic position of workers? What does it mean to speak critically of class exploitation in a country that not so long ago took pride in the ideology and achievements of a socialist workers’ democracy? What does neoliberal capitalism stand for in Macedonia today, and what is the nature of the inner struggles of its implementation? How is social and economic change and inequality accepted, challenged and negotiated? How are we to define these categories, and how useful are they for the social analysis of the everyday life of workers? We can begin by looking at some of the historical debates surrounding class, culture and power and introduce some definitions that will be used throughout the thesis.

1.2 Approaching Labour Studies: Class, Culture and Power

Most anthropological and sociological studies of labour, ever since the days of Gluckman's research on the African industrial revolution, have been either influenced by Marxist ideas or somehow compelled to engage in debates with them. Gluckman's own analysis of tribalism in rural and urban environments, was informed by a teleological reading of Marx that assumed both the linear development of industrial modernity and an organic unity between class (position in the relations of production) and social identity. His analysis betrays the conviction that, once under way, the wave of industrial modernization is irreversible. It would override tribal and ethnic identities and create new forms of urban and unionized organization and wider associations based on class and occupation (1963: 69). This mythical one way journey towards progress and modernity reflected some of the experiences and history of early British industrialization, casting little doubt on where the road led (Ferguson 1999: 6).

Such crude economic reductionism was not to remain unchallenged for long even within debates among Marxists. It soon became evident that the global spread of an industrial workforce does not in itself create the conditions for class consciousness or solidarity. Revisions were needed and some of the more influential ones came from the French structuralist thought of Louis Althusser. Althusser's writings had the effect of liberating Marxist theory from sterile models of economism and technologism that reduced history to a singular evolutionary process. His reading of Marx emphasized that the general social contradiction in Marxism, i.e. the class struggle embodied in the antagonism between labour and capital, does not in and by itself establish the conditions for social revolution. On the contrary Althusser writes, '*the Capital-Labour contradiction is never simple, but always specified by the historically concrete forms*

and circumstances in which it is exercised (Althusser [1969] 2005: 101; original emphasis); in other words:

“the ‘contradiction’ is inseparable from the total structure of the social body in which it is found, inseparable from its formal conditions of existence, and even from the instances it governs; it is radically affected by them, determining, but also determined in one and the same movement, and determined by the various levels and instances of the social formation it animates; it might be called *overdetermined* in its principle” (ibid: 101).

What Althusser is saying here is that there is no “pure” form of class antagonism; the latter is always immersed in local “customs [and] specific ... traditions” all of which are “specified by the *internal and external historical situation*” (ibid: 106; original emphasis). The economic base (i.e. the structure or mode of production comprised of the forces and relations of production) remains determinant but only in the last instance, in the long run of History. In the meantime our task is to investigate the specific relationship between this base and the *superstructure* (the State, the legal, political and ideological apparatuses) in its changing historical circumstances, and identify the obstacles to achieving class consciousness (ibid: 111-2). Althusser's best known contribution to this project is his essay on “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (1971), where he addresses the role of religion and the state - expressed through such mechanisms as the police, the church, education or the various bureaucratic manifestations of civil society - in the reproduction of class inequality. The reproduction and supply of labour power, he famously insisted, did not just require the reproduction of its skills, but also, “at the same time, reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression” (1971: 132-133). What ideological

apparatuses do, is establish the ideological system within which subjects can recognize themselves in the subject categories required by capital. Althusser dubs this act of recognition, “interpellation, or hailing” which can be portrayed using the commonplace hailing such as “Hey you there!”

“Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was 'really' addressed to him (sic), and that 'it was really him who was hailed' (and not someone else)” (Althusser 1971: 174-5).

Althusser’s great contribution was to point the way in which language and ideology determine social practice by shaping subjectivity and his writings influenced a generation of thinkers who found in his treatment of class, ideology and consciousness a fruitful analytical approach to the relationship between local cultures and class hierarchies. Nonetheless, his assumptions about the top down homogenous operations of ideology proved to be as controversial as the implicit claim that only through (Althusserian) philosophy could a critique of ideology be made possible, and that it alone possessed the theoretical and scientific tools to demystify knowledge that would otherwise relapse into ideological tantrums. In his model, ruling elites prepare subject categories in advance and use state apparatuses to recruit subjects, and they recruit them *all* (ibid: 174). The subject has no power to respond to the call with variation or to even reject it altogether. Yet Althusser’s closed structural model never quite explains why the hailing work so well and reach its target unvitiated. It is precisely this gap between the hailing and the internalization of the call that is exploited by his critics as the space that opens up the possibility for resistance where one can rebel, elude or ignore the interpellation.

For example, Willis' (1981) ethnography of a West-Midlands school in the UK shows how local working class “lads” learn to value local traditions of manual labour above middle class “clean” office jobs (148). They relied on alternative definitions of respect, work and sociability that challenge, or, “penetrate” the ideology of disciplining school structures that emphasize educational achievement and “modern” white collar skilled work. On the one hand, these forms of resistance simultaneously reproduce gendered patterns of inequality as well as play into the hands of international capital dependent on the *willing* supply of manual labour. In Willis words “it is in the form of creative penetrations that cultures live their own damnations and that ... working class kids *condemn themselves* to a future of manual work” (1981: 174; my emphasis). Local culture thus presents itself as a 'false consciousness', tainted by the ideology of the dominant and offering a false sense of empowerment that ends up in the service of international capital. Drawing on Althusser and Gramsci, central to Willis' thought is the notion of *consent* as an instrument for the reproduction of uneven relations of production (Gramsci 1992: 266).

Departing from Althusser however, Willis does not approach ideology as total and unidirectional (top to bottom), but instead demonstrates how the “lads” are capable of subverting official dogma. By demonstrating the capacity for “partial penetrations” Willis remains open to the possibility for cultural practices to make more substantial challenges to the ideology of the dominant by the “reordering of social signification” (Willis 2000: 36). For Willis, any breaks or reversals in the “ideological chain” always carry “important connections with, and crucial reproductive functions with respect to, the rest of the social system” (Willis 1981: 179). In other words, cultural penetrations, albeit partial, find their reflections in the larger whole of which they are a part. This is an important point for this thesis, in which I will pay specific attention to the

relationship between class and culture; or, the way in which the culturally informed practices of industrial labourers often impede the operations of market rationality by, for example, valuing mutuality over individuality. But before I proceed, we need to develop this idea in more detail.

1.2.1 The Idea of a “Moral Economy”

This reference to the possibilities of culture acting as a platform for resistance has been more developed in the writings of E. P. Thompson and James C. Scott, particularly through the concept of “moral economies”. Thompson is perhaps the most responsible for popularizing the term through his analysis of the bread riots of eighteenth century England, where he challenged the idea that they could be reduced to price increases and actual deprivation. Instead, he highlighted the popular consensus among the rioters (colliers, tanners, weavers and hosiery workers) about what is right and wrong in their social sphere. “Rioting” says Thompson, cannot be explained away as mere “rebellions of the belly” that reduces people to biological machines that spontaneously erupt into a mob whenever food prices go up (1971: 77). People certainly go hungry but what they do when this happens is always modified by “custom, culture and reason” that offer legitimacy to their actions in the face of hunger (ibid: 78). Consequently, eighteenth century crowds were not only informed by the belief that “defending traditional rights and customs” but also “that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community (ibid). Notions of ‘need’ and ‘reasonable price’ were at the centre of their moral value system in which economic activities were also integrated (Hann 2010: 190). Opposition to capitalism did not take place on strictly economic terms (exploitation of surplus labour etc.) but as a “resistance to capitalism’s innate tendency to reduce all

human relationships to economic definitions” (Thompson 1979: 84) - a resistance to the annunciation of *homo economicus* (ibid).

James Scott picked up on Thompson’s lead and was one of the first to employ the concept of moral economy as an analytical tool in his study of peasants in Southeast Asia, where he emphasized a strong communal ethic which prioritized the subsistence of all members of the local community (Hann 191: 2010; Scott 1976: 1-4). Scott did not necessarily see peasant culture as a holy grail that, when disturbed, immediately provokes peasants into open rebellion against the elites. He was rather more concerned with the specific conditions under which the moral and the economic may converge with other social factors and historical circumstances to inspire rebellion (Scott 1976: 4). He did however treat local peasant culture as a repository of values where ideas and representations of “an alternative moral [and just] universe” or a “dissident subculture” that unites its members into a human “community of values” are preserved and nurtured (ibid: 240).

For both Scott and Thompson however, the idea of a moral economy presumes a shared consensus between members of the community regarding the values it espouses.

Moreover, in both cases we are dealing with subjects of a Marxist analysis whose moral economy constitutes a nexus of beliefs and practices conducive to progressive action against the powers that be. In other words, one can easily deduce the language of class conflict and interest from this formulation and, as Edelman notes, Thompson considered the concept of moral economies to have little currency outside of a wider framework of conflictual class relations (Edelman 2012: 60). Thompson’s understanding of class is far from rigid and he defines the latter in terms of a process rather than a finished product - hence the emphasis on “Making” in his celebrated “The Making of the English Working Class” (1964). To refer to a lengthier quote:

“Class is a social and cultural formation (often finding institutional expression) which cannot be defined abstractly, or in isolation, but only in terms of relationship with other classes; and, ultimately, the definition can only be made in the medium of time – that is, action and reaction, change and conflict. When we speak of a class we are thinking of a very loosely defined body of people who share the same categories of interests, social experiences, traditions and value-system, who have a *disposition to behave* as a class, to define themselves in their actions and in their consciousness in relation to other groups of people in class ways. But class itself is not a thing, it is a happening” (Thompson 1979: 85).

This definition of class allows Thompson a number of strategic advantages. Firstly he treats social and cultural phenomena on an equal footing with the economic and does not necessarily see the latter as determinant “in the last instance”, hence his emphasis on a wide range of factors that define the social body of a class. What Thompson insists on, is maintaining his opposition to any form of reification of the notion of “class” as an entity in-itself that we can take for granted by mere virtue of its economic position in the relations of production. If we do so, we allow language to lead us into fetishistic discussions of “classes” doing this or that and “forget exactly where *agency* lies, not in class but in men (sic)” (1979: 86). The emphasis on acts of everyday human agency is precisely what distinguishes Thompson from Althusser’s concern with the all pervasiveness of ideology and the institutions of the elite. Workers and peasants are, Thompson says, quite capable of having an “ideology” of their own, one that more often than not refuses to fit in with the designs of the powerful and as such is important for “the way in which class relations are negotiated” (1991: 344). In other words, the traditions of “dead generations” need not weigh “like a nightmare on the brains of the living” (see Marx [1852] 2000: 229) and might in fact carry the seeds of progressive politics. We can see much of this process coming to life in contemporary Macedonia

where the widespread refusal to internalize the principles of homo-economicus draws upon past experiences of the moral economy of socialism. Workers often rely on their experiences of alternative economic orders to critically reflect, and comment upon, the material and symbolic decline of the socialist working class that brought about a wave of precarity and the emergence of new elites. More often than not such reflections entail a moral commentary on the ethics of the neoliberal turn, which is largely experienced as transgressive and a violation of established norms and values of mutuality and equity.

1.2.2 Polanyi and the Concept of “Embeddedness”

But if Thompson’s neo-Marxist approach has opened up the category of class to historical and social analysis, it has been less productive in its treatment of culture. The emphasis on consensus and a fluid yet binding system of values that somehow manages to pit “poor” against “rich” does open his approach to criticism. Being a system of beliefs and practices one can easily deduce that a moral economy can be conducive to reactionary, nationalist behaviour among members of the same “class”. Owing mainly to the difficulty of disentangling culture from Marxist notions of class, Thompson’s “moral economy” has lost much of its original meaning wherever it has not fallen out of use altogether. Conversely, anthropologists have found a much more enduring intellectual influence in the figure of Karl Polanyi. In his seminal work, *The Great Transformation*, Polanyi, much like Thompson, argued against the formalism of neoclassical economists that saw economic activity as inherently independent and detached from the wider moral networks of “society”. Polanyi relied on a great deal of anthropological literature to demonstrate that in societies where market driven economic models had not yet prevailed, economic activity is integrated into the wider value

system of a given society and linked to local ideas of reciprocity, redistribution and householding (2001: 57). The purpose of economic activity in this pre-market dominated system was to satisfy substantive human needs and not to maximize the self-interest of the individual. This type of socially embedded economy was, he argued, the “natural” state of things, and that the emergence of “self-regulating” markets was the result of a concentrated effort by states to create such an institution.

Consequently, Polanyi interpreted the history of 19th and 20th century Europe as a pull and tug struggle between market forces on the one end and social forces on the other. The crucial difference with Thompson however is that for Polanyi, “society” stands for something altogether more politically multifarious than the notion of “class struggle” can bear. The ideology of self-regulating markets does not so much wage a class war as it threatens to destroy the very fabric of society by disembedding economic activity from the socially defined needs of human beings (Polanyi 2001: 151). The inherent tensions in the “double movement” between market and society and the disembedding of the economy, can produce a variety of responses only some of which can be “socialist-progressive” in nature, whereas others can be profoundly reactionary and nationalistic. “Fascism”, Polanyi writes, “like socialism, was rooted in a market society that refused to function” (ibid: 248). It was itself a response to issues that “transcended the economic sphere and begot a general transformation of a distinctively social kind” (ibid).

Anticipating Polanyi, Marcuse already in 1934 described the worldview of fascism as “a great reservoir for all the currents that have been deluging ‘liberalist’ political and social theory since World War I” (Marcuse [1934] 2009: 1). For illustration Marcuse draws attention to a quote from the Nazi educationalist Ernst Krieck:

“Blood rises up against formal understanding, race against the rational pursuit of ends, honor against profit, bonds against the caprice that is called ‘freedom’, organic totality against individualistic dissolution, valor against bourgeois security, politics against the primacy of the economy, state against society, folk against the individual and the mass.”

Marcuse of course writes from a Marxist perspective and his main intention here is to demonstrate that the anti-liberal element of fascism is peripheral and that fascist ideology only succeeds in reviling the merchant by leaving intact the “foundations of the economic order” (ibid: 7). The point which remains is that it would be misleading to assume that as soon as the “moral” enters the economic process it is somehow inherently opposed to the amorality of market forces. Indeed, as Max Weber (1992) famously argued, they may not necessarily be two different things to begin with.

To draw on a more contemporary post-socialist example to illustrate this point, we can briefly turn to Hann’s study of the decollectivization of agriculture in Hungary (2010: 195). Namely, the initial collectivization process by the Communists was viewed by most villagers as a violent intervention in the established norms of private property. The Independent Smallholders’ Party (ISP), which enjoyed great popularity for its opposition to the collectivization process in the forties, was eliminated during the harsher years of socialism, only to re-emerge in the nineties with a revived agenda for the restoration of private ownership. By this time however the agricultural community had mixed emotions about how to handle the de-collectivization process. Many had been nostalgic about the socialist arrangement which allowed for individuals to prosper as a result of their hard work, yet provided a cushion for the weaker labourers. The supporters of privatization argued for the return of pre-collectivization plot boundaries and stressed the *moral* and emotional attachment to their patrimony. As a result the ISP

split into several factions and many of its former members now vote for extreme right wing parties (Hann 2010: 195).

What Hann demonstrates is that there is no reason to assume that popular culture and “traditional value-systems” are either a binding or a progressive force in opposition to capital. In my own work I often found workers confronting the negative consequences of the neoliberalist transformation by resorting to a variety of “moral” strategies that relied on national sentiments, as much as on a culture of patriarchy and metaphors of kinship, which often acted against their corporate class interests and facilitated the reform of the welfare state and the dominance of economic elites. In other words, whereas the moral operations of “society” can prevent the emergence of the “purely economical” they are less likely to prevent the relative alienation of economic institutions within the wider relations of production (Mollona 2009: 43). To understand this we need to have a deeper look at the ways in which economic practices operate within and throughout the symbolics and politics of culture.

1.2.3 Culture and Domination in the Work of Pierre Bourdieu

The main advantage of Polanyi’s approach is that it allows for a much more politically open-ended analysis of the interplay between social and economic factors in a given setting. It is precisely this interplay that informs the sociological writings of Pierre Bourdieu, who treats every form of social practice, including economic, as inseparable from the wider “social order in which all human practice is immersed” (Bourdieu 2005: 1). This much corresponds to the Polanyian notion of “embeddedness”, however for Bourdieu the main political field is not located in the “double movement” but within the social structures of which economic practice partakes, or what he terms *habitus*.

By *habitus*, Bourdieu means the inculcation of sets of durable dispositions (habits) that lead to particular practices that in turn (re)produce the conditions for their reproduction (1977: 78). These dispositions do not lead to some conscious submission to rules, but to an unconscious and tacit compliance with the *doxa* of a social order, by which he means the naturalized and unquestionable social arrangement that denies the very possibility of imagining alternatives (ibid: 164). This structuralist argument is not entirely circular and Bourdieu allows for the possibility of *heterodoxy* as a challenge to *doxa*, against which the established order must respond by reasserting itself in a new *orthodoxy*. However, by forcing the established order to speak in its own defence, orthodoxy by implication posits the guardians of tradition as simply one possible option among others and is itself “a necessarily imperfect substitute” for *doxa* (ibid: 169).

The habitus of social life appears in different forms relative to the particular social 'field' it animates. A field is a system of social relations (political field, religious field, philosophical field etc.) in which institutions or individuals compete for certain prizes or stakes whose value is set by the field's internal logic (Bourdieu 1995: 72). The scholastic field would thus prescribe the highest value to scholastically certified cultural capital which is irreducible to the specific interests and capital generated in another field (e.g. philosophers do not compete for prizes that interest textile workers etc.) (ibid). The accumulation of these prizes increases the overall “symbolic capital” of an agent. Symbolic capital is a form of power not recognized as power which allows one to make “legitimate demands for recognition, deference, obedience or the services of others” and enhances one’s capacity to define and defend the *orthodoxy*, i.e. the rules of the game within a specific field (Swartz 1997: 90). Each field has its own antagonism between those in power that defend *orthodoxy* and those that aspire to subvert the power structure hence introducing *heterodoxy*. But as long as the antagonists are in tacit

agreement about “what is it that is worth fighting about” they share the same state of *doxa* with all the unquestioned presuppositions they unwittingly accept (ibid: 73).

We should point out three important points that characterise Bourdieu's ideas. Firstly, his mechanistic and economistic treatment of culture which he engages with in ways similar to those in which a Marxist tradition would engage with material economies, i.e. the central role of culture in maintaining social hierarchies. Secondly, because of his mechanistic and practice oriented approach Bourdieu is not terribly concerned with questions of consciousness, representation and imagination (Bourdieu 1994: 267-8).

The actions of individuals need not be validated at the level of consciousness, but by a tacit compliance with all “that which goes without saying”; with the rules and principles of a game whose very foundations are never challenged by the “*partial revolutions*” of heterodoxy (1995: 73). Lastly, with consciousness side-lined, centrality is given to the bodily practice and the way in which social structures are inscribed onto and appropriate the body which is thus rendered capable to engage with and appropriate its social surroundings (1977: 89).

It is obvious that Bourdieu is not terribly sympathetic to Marxist visions of a unified working class, conscious of its shared interests and acting 'for itself' to achieve these. The mechanisms of the habitus and the atomization of the social cosmos into various “fields”, each with their own logic, where individuals compete for different types of capital (cultural, economic, social, symbolic), have profound implications for his understanding of class. According to Bourdieu, ‘class’ cannot be defined only by a subject's position in the relations of production, or by occupation, but by a whole gamut of factors including gender, social and ethnic origin, age and geographical location, all of which determine principles of selection and exclusion, without necessarily being formally stated (1998: 102-3). Consequently, any attempt to define the contours of the

social category of say, textile workers, by focusing only on occupation at the expense of all other factors can lead to crude analytical errors and obscure the extent to which the class 'is becoming "feminized" or "masculinized", growing older or younger' more or less educated etc. (ibid).

Moreover, he finds the Althusserian treatment of ideology as similarly unproductive insofar as ideology, even in its various socio-historical manifestations is always of and presupposes the state and insofar as those manifestations are in the long run, overdetermined by the economic structure. Rather than a grand analysis of "ideology and state apparatuses" Bourdieu is more concerned with the specific mechanisms by which culture informs the everyday practices of people, or the way in which symbolic power structures and legitimates a particular social reality. Even though the symbolic can be used to legitimize economic exploitation it is not reducible to the economic. Rather, "symbolic practices deflect attention from the interested character of practices and thereby contribute to their enactment as disinterested pursuits. This misperception legitimizes these practices and thereby contributes to the reproduction of the social order in which they are embedded" (Swartz 1997: 90).

Bourdieu's approach is particularly useful for my analysis of the symbolic struggles taking place in the terrain of post-socialism in order to legitimize and normalize emerging distinctions, but also for the way in which workers articulate "class" as something that transcends a shared position in the relations of production. While at a certain level workers do recognize their shared fate on the assembly line, they juggle this commensurability with distinctions between workers that arise on the basis of gender, ethnicity, education, tastes and mannerisms and age. Women for example are usually seen as docile and passive by male co-workers, hence unfit for political action. University educated workers who mourn having to do long hours of manual labour do

not necessarily identify with the plight of semi-literate workers of a peasant origin. Horizontal solidarity, where it does occur, is not a taken for granted product of a shared class identity but a fleeting negotiation of differences and hierarchies that become more or less relevant in different contexts. Likewise, vertical relations between dominant classes and workers are not by definition antagonistic and require a great deal of symbolic and cultural legitimation that involves all sides. By following the operations of symbolic power we can explore how and when certain distinctions between persons based on economic, social and cultural capital are constructed, normalized and challenged. The owner of the factory where I did my fieldwork, for example, engages in a particular set of practices that distinguish him in terms of dress, social movements, consumption patterns that create a sense of distinction and class separation from “common” workers without necessarily provoking antagonisms. In other words, class is something that is often experienced, articulated and embodied in ways that cannot be reduced to economic factors.

1.2.4 Foucault and the Productivity of Power

The overbearing power of culture and its central role in the reproduction of structures of domination in the work of Bourdieu, deals a heavy blow to any conceptualization of politics as an arena where the down-and-out always seem to be conjuring up values, identities and practices that keep outflanking the capitalist rear-guard. However, the main weakness of Bourdieu’s powerful conceptual strategy is to be found precisely in his overemphasis on power as a *reproductive* force and his insufficient attention to the *productive* capacity of power. This latter point has been the key concern in the work of Michel Foucault for whom power is never merely repressive. Foucault approaches

power as “a productive network that runs through the whole social body” and works, or is “accepted” because it “produces things, induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse” (Foucault 1984: 61). Resistance, insofar as it occurs, does not stand in opposition to power but operates through and within existing systems of power and repression. Framing the argument in this way allows Foucault to treat modern power as a decentered conglomerate of affiliations, antagonisms and exchanges where the task of governing is reduced to carving out the space and defining the techniques of intervention into what is already a more or less self-creating sphere (Burchell 1993: 267). In fact the very notion of a Centre of Power (government) is made redundant in favour of a field of interaction between the self-regulating practices of individuals and the rationality that informs the guiding hand of government. In Foucault’s words:

“... if one wants to analyze the genealogy of the subject in Western civilization ...

He has to take into account the points where the technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself. And conversely, he has to take into account the points where the techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion and domination.

The contact point, where the individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves, is what we can call, I think, government” (in, Lemke 2002:

52-3).

Power, or the power to govern is reduced to the guidance of self-governing individuals; the carving out of the limits of possible action of subjects which is itself a process where subjects are active participants instead of passive recipients. This approach has been adopted by Aihwa Ong in her classic ethnography of spirit possessions in a Malaysian shoe factory where she explores the friction between encroaching global neoliberal regimes of power and local culture. Through this interplay of the global and

the local Ong seeks to challenge Marxist assumptions that relations of production have an over-determining effect on the identity of workers, and focus instead on the “imaginative life [on] the factory floor” (Ong 1987: xiv). When looking at the lives of shop floor workers, Ong suggests that “cultural concepts are not the mere epiphenomena of class power or cultural values but are constituting knowledge/power systems producing the ‘truths’ whereby we live our lives” (1987: 180).

A brief summary of her ethnographic argument will be made here in order to tease out some the themes that will inform this thesis.

As a response to growing social tensions over the distribution of power in Malaysian society in the seventies, the Malaysian government decided to implement various agricultural and industrialization programs that drew Malay men and women away from the traditional village compounds and into urban schools and foreign owned manufacturing plants. Because they were perceived as cheap and easily controlled labour, within a decade almost fifty thousand mostly unmarried Malay women came to fill the ranks of assembly line workers. Once in the factories however, Malay women proved much more difficult to discipline than expected. Quiescent workers would burst into fits of rage and screaming caused by sudden spirit attacks, causing stoppages in production. For Ong, spirits represent transgressions of moral boundaries precisely because they are disembodied beings unbound by human rules (Ong 1988: 30). As such, they manifest themselves to those who venture into amoral spaces and attack people who “unknowingly step out of the Malay social order” (ibid: 31). Once removed from the traditional village environment, young women in factories often found themselves in spaces where the traditional moral boundaries that sustained personal integrity and regulated the interaction between men and women no longer applied.

Ong interprets the bouts of spirit possessions in factories as a protest against changing social relations brought about by the process of industrial capitalism as a result of which workers become “alienated from their bodies, the products of their work and their own culture” (ibid 38). They are a way of articulating what cannot be said publicly, that is, a call for the renegotiation of social relationships on the shop floor between management and workers in ways that are less dehumanizing for the latter. For Ong however, the resistance expressed by workers is not geared against capitalist accumulation as such, but is more an opposition to the loss of autonomy and local notions of personhood. The values that inform this opposition are extra-economic and furnish a moral critique of the violation of the “fundamental humanity” of Malay workers through the production process. It is this culturally informed moral critique of personal degradation that factory managers are forced to deal with to their inconvenience. Whatever empowerment workers possess does not seem to derive just from the economic but, as with Thompson and Scott, from the cultural. Yet Ong moves away from them in the crucial sense that she is not inclined to pair the value system of Malay women with any notion of class. Malay women have no “class consciousness” (ibid: 194) but that does not mean we should assume that they are “over-determined” by their insertion in the capitalist production process. At the imaginative level, they are still able to forge novel and often unexpected *subjectivities*. In other words, resistance is always played out within and throughout forms of power and domination rather than “outside” of them. This is Foucault’s key contribution to the understanding of power brought to full fruition and to the dismay of the cultural studies approach that insists on maintaining the notion of class struggle as the centripetal force of social antagonism, for which the possibility of acting outside of the mediated forms of capital is a necessary corollary of political action.

Whereas Thompson does see the weak and the powerful as mutually constitutive, he sees them as such in terms of class, which is what he means when he says that classes always exist in their relation to other classes. For Thompson the social history of eighteenth century England can be seen as a series of moral and cultural confrontations between the “plebs” and the “gentry and clergy” through which class distinctions are historically crystallized. If he sees the immersion of the labouring poor into industrial capitalism as empowering, it is only in so in the sense of helping to foster a new “class consciousness”. Ong’s departure is subtle yet of great consequence. Resistance to capitalism may indeed occur and does occur among Malaysian workers. But one does not find there Thompson’s miners and railwaymen struggling for reform inspired by an imagined “totality of an egalitarian socialist society” (1978: 144). Resistance to capitalism need not be about socialist reform led by class awareness, but about the negotiation of cultural values and social boundaries that constitute a particular experience of personhood as a moral force. Ong’s focus on socio-economic transformation and the renegotiation of personhood within liminal moral zones is of particular importance for this thesis. As we shall see, many of the conflicts and debates emerging from the transformation of Macedonia’s social and economic landscape touch upon and unsettle the integrity of the moral self, which produces zones of friction where the refusal to internalize change is channeled within systems of power and domination rather than outside of them. For example, a key argument in this thesis is that workers, more often than not, seek to change the contours of hierarchy and inequality in ways that correspond to their moral economy and conceptions of personhood.

1.3 Liminality and Abjection

The approaches outlined above are to an extent all concerned with the social and cultural management of economic transition (feudalism to capitalism, socialism to neoliberalism, peasants to factories etc.). On the one hand we have the various operations of control that accompany this transition (ideological interpellation, consensus, habitus, governmentality etc.) and on the other something we may call resistance, whether in the form of culture, class or subjectivity, which are not exclusive but produce each other. This thesis will try to speak to this tension as it unfolds through the various transitions that have taken and are still taking place in post-socialist Macedonia. The thread of the argument will oscillate between four main points: first, the prevalence of perceptions of the economy as an embedded activity bounded by social relations of mutuality and redistribution; second, the historically changing ways in which the argument for embeddedness is being articulated by workers deprived of the currency of socialism and class as rallying points; third, the specific consequences this has for the articulation and integrity of the moral person; and fourth, the political challenge this poses for the state and the centripetal forces of neoliberalism, particularly efforts to wither away the welfare state and introduce the arrival of homo-economicus. I use the latter term duplicitously to refer to neoliberalism both as an “art of government” in the Foucauldian sense (neoliberal rationality), and to the process of liberalization, marketization and state withdrawal that succeeded the socialist project (neoliberal capitalism) (see Ferguson 2009).

I suggest that act of rejection of socialism can be seen as part of the ritual *unmaking* of a social structure and the specific subjects that populate it. One useful way to approach this is through Turner’s reworking of Van Gennep’s concept of *liminality*. Van Gennep (1960) challenged the naturalist models of human development of his day by

demonstrating that the “journey through life” and the various transitions from one social position to another was never complete unless socially sanctioned through a carefully orchestrated ritual process. He dubbed this process the “rites of passage” and separated its functions into three distinct stages: separation, margin and aggregation. In the first stage an individual is detached from her existing place in the structure, in the second (liminal) phase she acquires ambiguous characteristics, belonging neither to the previous nor the coming state; and the third stage the person is reincorporated in a new stable social position. Turner took on the middle liminal stage as much more than merely one more necessary component for reproducing structure. He writes that people resort to a variety of systems of classification that “keep chaos at bay” whilst in the process stifling discovery and innovation. Yet guided by the “need” to “live breathe and generate novelty” they create “by structural means” an “antistructural” liminal space where novel “suppositions, desires, hypotheses, possibilities all become legitimate” (Turner 1991: vii). Liminality is thus important not only in the ritual transition of subjects from one social position to another within the structure, but also for introducing unforeseen changes to that structure.

Though I find certain elements of Turner’s model useful, particularly the emphasis on liminality as the site of *uncharted possibilities*, there are others that I expressly wish to reject; such as the implicit teleological modernism that sees liminality as part of a historical forward movement, oscillating between stable structure and controlled chaos. Also I find problematic Turner’s assertion that the transition of the subject is almost always a social movement from “low” to “high” (ibid: 197). To proceed along these lines would be to tell the story of how the old “worker” had to be undone or separated from the socialist system and tossed into an anti-structural liminal stage (of precarious unemployment), where subjects are neither what they were (the failed vanguard of

socialism) nor what are yet to become (free and prosperous entrepreneurs). Finally, order would be restored based on the ethics of market behaviour and everyone will assume their place in the new and improved system. To do this would be to fall right into the teleological web of the great neoliberal transformation (or even that of the socialist modernism preceding it).

I take a hint from Ferguson here in assuming a non-linear, non-teleological approach in order to “follow a range of reactions and strategies that shift over time in ways that do not sustain a simple linear narration” (1999: 20). From the standpoint of people caught up in the transition, *liminality* itself appears as the new norm. One popular joke frames this well: ‘The finance minister said Macedonia will not be affected by the global crisis. We’re already in a crisis for twenty years now!’ The seemingly endless perpetuation of this precarious state of affairs is seen as absurd and people seem perpetually caught in a state of flux. In contrast, by-gone socialist times have mnemonically crystalized as the loci of stability and abundance. When making inquiries about socialism people often told me that “Back then you would be given work [always] according to your qualifications.” The wording is important here. One did not find work during socialism, one was given it by the state which had the moral responsibility and authority to delegate employment in accordance with people’s needs and abilities. It was the big Other guaranteeing a semblance of order that has now withdrawn to the much humbler role of a distant administrator. In other narrative reconstructions of the past it was the loss of the socialist firm that went hand in hand with the disruption of the developmental cycle of families and the dis-ordering of public space. As one of my neighbours put it when referring to the demise of Astibo, the local garment producing giant:

“All the workers there knew that there was always work there for their children. They even gave out stipends for the workers’ children to go on studies. But all of their kids had a guaranteed job there. Such a nice place it was, the town really was a beautiful place. Everything was clean and tidy. Now it’s all shabby and filthy it makes my soul cry. We were the regional center before and now all the nearby towns are ahead of us, *we’re the forgotten place.*”

With the cycle in tatters, new flexible labour regimes have introduced a kind of “permanent state of economic emergency” (Žižek 2010) but also a crisis of personhood (Cohen 1974: 58). No longer the vanguard of society and lacking a clear narrative and symbolic subject position in the new order, workers struggle with the subjective experience of becoming “matter out of place” (Douglas [1966] 2001: 36), in many ways resembling those lost souls in the senseless hallways of Fredric Jameson’s swanky Westin Bonaventura Hotel (Ortner 2005: 45). Jameson is here basically referring to the stultifying effects of alienation in late capitalism, characterized by social confusion and spatial disorder, which has the makings of a world drained of meaning and affect and populated by disoriented subjects devoid of historical purpose (Jameson 1984).

There are certainly traces of these effects in the landscape of post-socialist Macedonia. In her book titled *Waiting for Macedonia* that focused on a group of young female engineers in Skopje in the period from 1988 to 1996, Ilka Thiessen writes that the Beckett-inspired title sprang from the way in which people of different backgrounds recounted their experiences of postsocialism and post-Yugoslavism. Much like the famous play, the starting (and ending) point is a resounding “Nothing to be done”. Macedonia is “a non-subject of action, from neither the inside nor the outside: the story of Macedonia neither creates nor resolves conflicts, does not develop either ethical or

political programs of reform, and it does not offer meaning for its human existence.

Every interpretation is null. There is no direction and no aim” (Thiessen 2007: 14).

For many Macedonians, Yugoslav membership was the tether connecting them to a European community of civilization, progress and modernity as opposed to the dark pre-Yugoslav, orientalist history of a backward peasantry dominated by Ottoman rule (Thiessen 2007: 35; Graan 2010: 838). The demise of Yugoslav socialism and the ‘transition’ towards an imagined European future of economic prosperity and job security that will resurrect the middle class consumer, has made the present appear as a liminal phase filled with disorder and insecurity but also with desires of reconstitution (Turner 1991: vii). Ferguson has defined the experience of people caught up in this process as one of *abjection*, a term adapted from Kristeva, signifying a process “of being thrown aside, expelled or discarded ... but ... also being thrown down – thus expulsion, but also debasement and humiliation” (Ferguson 1999: 236). This implies the loss, rather than the lack of a world of amenities and the loss of a sense of connectedness with a larger world of modern “first class citizens”.

This experience becomes particularly visible through the breakdown of the myth of linear modernization in the face of total economic collapse. A “myth” is after all “not just a mistaken account” of reality, “but a cosmological blueprint that lays down fundamental categories and meanings for the organization of experience” (Ferguson 1999: 13). It is in this sense that we can follow Verdery in approaching post-socialist change as a “problem of reorganization on a cosmic scale” that involves the “reordering of people’s entire meaningful worlds ... including morality, social relations and basic meanings” (1999: 35). On the one hand this experience augments their sense of precarious insecurity and can be politically demobilizing. On the other hand workers do not remain entirely passive and people are everyday caught in a struggle “to make sense

of their experience and to find new ways of conceptualizing the broad social and economic changes that rock their lives” (Ferguson 1999: 14). As Anderson contends, it is precisely when subjects reflect on their involvement in a situation of absurdity that they begin to open up the individual or collective imagination to the possibility of alternatives (2013: 478). But what might such alternatives be and what kinds of political subjects do they involve in the case of post-socialist Macedonia?

1.4 Dependent Persons

In a recent essay James Ferguson (2013) has suggested that we re-examine our established preconceptions of personhood that rest on the presumably cross-cultural value of individual autonomy and self-sufficiency. He points to the somewhat surprisingly common practice in post-apartheid South Africa where people are "openly pursuing a subordinate and dependent status"; and instead of resisting "hierarchical subordination" people are actively seeking it out (ibid: 224). The reason we look at such practices as disturbing leftovers of colonial mentality is to be found precisely in the history of anti-oppressive struggles in which we are invited to equate human dignity with autonomy and independence. Consequently, dependence, as it moves up the scale, becomes a process of dehumanization or degradation. The trouble with this view is that it rests upon a specific understanding of personhood in which authentic human beings are seen as holistic individuals who ought to be able to fully govern their own selves. In contrast he says, in many parts of Africa persons have historically never been understood as monadic individuals, "but as nodes in systems of relationships" that are more often than not of an explicitly hierarchical nature. In other words, the person does not precede the relations of dependence in which she enters but is constituted by those

very relations. It is precisely through networks of dependence that one becomes incorporated into a social system within which one could be recognized as holding a valued social position, with opportunities for improving it (ibid: 227). Outside of such relations you are a “nobody”, a person of no consequence.

My analysis will show that the specific economic culture nurtured by socialism rests on a similar understanding of personhood. I will argue that what held the system together was not the successful internalization of the ideology of a workers’ democracy, but a complex web of interdependencies between workers, technocrats and the state within the framework of a redistributive “moral economy” geared towards the satisfaction of substantive human needs. Being part of this network meant being someone, or being recognized as a moral person in relation to others and with certain rights to make claims on those others. In other words, persons during socialism were not constituted as monadic individuals but as “dividuals” which requires seeing persons as “constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them” (Strathern 1990: 13). Through their position within socialist firms and the moral economy of redistribution workers were to a great extent able to operate on themselves by operating on others, whether co-workers or superiors in the form of managerial technocrats or party officials, and thus satisfy both their moral and material needs (Dunn 2004).

But it is precisely this kind of entanglement between the moral and the economic that was identified as an obstacle to post-socialist neoliberal reforms that sought to promote a new vision of the modern subject modelled on the image of the independent, risk taking entrepreneur. Macpherson has dubbed this specific kind of person the *possessive individual* and argued that the historical emergence of such a notion of personhood “corresponds substantially to the actual relations of a market society” (1962: 3-4). Within the realm of the latter individuals are seen as “owners” of their person and

capacities, independent from any larger social or moral whole. Such an understanding of personhood is an important precondition for imagining a model of a society where individuals freely exchange their capacities (e.g. labour power) and possessions on the market.

The application of this model in post-socialist Macedonia however, has only tended to generate growing forms of inequality and precarity under the legitimizing veil of individualism. For example the rhetoric of individual responsibility has not only facilitated the withdrawal of the welfare state but is effectively deployed on the shop floor as a means of controlling labour. We might be tempted therefore to interpret the possessive individual, in Althusserian fashion, as an ideological subject category that recruits from the masses and reproduces the supply of labour for capital. The trouble with this approach is that, the “recruits”, more often than not, refuse to *recognize* themselves in that category when entering into relations with the new captains of industry. Moreover, not all of the labour released through the dispossession of the industrial commons enjoyed the prospects of reabsorption (particularly the old and “unskilled”), effectively reducing a great portion of the labouring population to what Li terms an unnecessary “surplus” to the requirements of capital accumulation (2009: 67). In other words, the privatization process did its utmost in “releasing” individuals from the shackles of a state controlled economy (the “webs of dependence”) but it did not necessarily create the prospects of their re-absorption, and even when it did the integration took place on terms that were hardly acceptable for workers and are still being vigorously contested. Contra Althusser, we might say there were no “ready-made” subject categories at the end of the process, and that besides subjects, a whole class of people found themselves as superfluous *objects*, with no value recognized by capital.

The question then is, what happens to individual persons in the context of post-socialism marked by excessive labour surplus and suffused with a neoliberal commitment to the monadic individual as the very basis for the concept of the "free entrepreneur"? My own research suggests that as the economy took a turn towards "disembedding", the newly unemployed found themselves in pursuit of new forms of dependence in order to combat the prospects of remaining perilously unattached and unable to realize both their moral and economic needs. We can define these struggles, as Ferguson does, as attempts to shift their relationship to powerful others from a kind of "asocial inequality" brought about by the impersonality of the marketplace (i.e. exchanging labour for cash and leaving it at that), towards a form of "social inequality" (i.e. an enduring relationship in which the larger social and moral needs are also accounted for) (Ferguson 2013: 233). This may appear as a dubious distinction considering that when we speak of inequality, however conceived, we are usually speaking of some kind of relation between groups or individuals. In other words we are speaking about relations between human beings that are by some definition always "social". This much is certainly true, but what Ferguson means by "asocial inequality" is not something that occurs outside the scope of human relations, but a specific kind of relationship between human beings who do not relate to each other as members of a binding moral community (ibid: 233), i.e. where those who are dominated lack any social means to relate back to or make claims on the powerful.

Following from this, I suggest that workers' struggles, insofar as they exist in contemporary Macedonia, are not driven by the desire for autonomy but by a desire to become recognizable within some kind of imagined moral community. Such pursuits however differ in accordance with the way that workers interact with the needs of capital and their social position as it relates to differences in age, gender, education or

ethnicity. All of these factors open up different possibilities and limits to the pursuit of dependence by workers, who nonetheless share an underlying aversion to the arrival of homo-economicus. It is in these indeterminate struggles by people to contextualize and re-value themselves that we can look at the neoliberal transformation as a “productive” and “oppressive” at the same time.

1.5 Language and the Moral Community

In analysing the polyphony of workers voices and strategies it is important to pay close attention to the *uses* of language, particularly in the shaping of such a moral community and the corollary forms of personhood. In his speech act theory Austin suggests that language utterances can be “constative” (i.e. defined by their capacity to *say* something, describe reality and convey meaning), as well as “performative” in the sense that there is a world of utterances that mainly *do* something. Constative utterances can be true or false, logically consistent or inconsistent (“I am 30 years old”, “It is raining” etc.), whereas performative utterances deliver force and do not aim to describe reality but to act upon it and change it and can therefore be either “felicitous” or “infelicitous”. By this term Austin generally means “appropriate” or “well chosen for the circumstances” (Austin 1962: 15-16). In other words, they can only be “felicitous” if placed or used in the appropriate context, by which he means the open social setting with its existing conventions that include “the appropriate person uttering the appropriate words in the appropriate circumstances in order to obtain conventional results” (Yurchak 2005: 59). Austin lists a number of examples of performative utterances such as “I do” or “I name this ship Queen Elizabeth” that produce action and have effects. Thus the performative utterance “I do” can be “felicitous” if spoken at a specific ceremonial context of a

wedding and only if the person uttering the words is not already married in which case the results would be rather unconventional or “infelicitous”. Likewise, Austin says, if he were to approach a ship on the stocks and smashed the bottle hung at the stem, proclaiming “I name this ship the *Mr. Stalin*” his action would be with no social effect since he is not the person chosen to name it, nor did he apply the destined name. The action falls outside of accepted conventional procedure and is therefore “a mockery, like a marriage with a monkey” (Austin 1962: 24).

For example a rather common performative utterance in Macedonia would be “Ова никаде го нема!” which roughly translates as “This does not occur anywhere!” and is akin to the English saying “This is unheard of!” It is usually said in order to publicly decry certain transgressions of order and morality or a violation of widely shared conventions of acceptable behaviour. The statement is not intended to be scrutinized for its truth value, and in any case, one can more often than not easily demonstrate that the said transgression is not particularly original, or that it has indeed occurred elsewhere. But this of course would be to miss the point. The statement is not meant to offer an accurate description of reality but to deliver force and act upon reality so as to change it by, for example, restoring order. As stated, for the performative utterance to have force, or be “felicitous”, would depend on whether or not the context in which it is uttered includes others who share the same moral conventions or have the required means to intervene.

Yet, as Vološinov and Bakhtin reminds us, the “conventions” and “norms” that surround the communicative act are not floating semiological givens, but are firmly grounded in the open social event and that utterances are the product of a complex set of social interrelationships (1994: 41). In other words context implies a relationship between different subjects whose different perspectives, practices or activities always

mutually inform the larger whole in which they take part (Zigon 2008: 138). This in turn involves specific power relations, power structures and settings that shape the interaction and make context a malleable, constantly shifting and endlessly multiplying plateau (ibid). Or as Willis has argued, “socio-symbolic practices stabilize alternative liminal, uncoded or residually coded identities and meanings. They are held sensuously and practically and therefore relatively outside and resistant to dominant linguistic meaning. They refuse to be swallowed whole” (2000: 36). Thus conceived, my approach to socio-symbolic meanings and practices is in line with what Bakhtin terms “heteroglossia” (raznorechie). In his words:

“At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word (according to formal linguistic markers, especially phonetic), but also and for us this is the essential point - into languages that are socio-ideological: languages of social groups, "professional" and "generic" languages, languages of generations and so forth.” (Bakhtin 1981: 271).

For example, even if we agree that at a certain level neoliberalism is a synchronic abstraction - a dreamed up economic code with certain basic assumptions and universal truth claims about human nature - its actual form can only be located within the social event, i.e. the wider context of post-socialism where it currently stands not as a ubiquitous but a centripetal force engaged in antagonistic interaction with a plethora of diverging voices and worldviews (Chaput & Hanan 2014: 44). For example, as we will see in the following pages, privatization quickly became a discursive arena “of state formation, in which one can look for contradictory destatizing and restatizing processes” (Verdery 1996: 210), as well as clashing moralities and contending notions of personhood that bring together the voices of workers (in various guises), employers, the state as well as international financial operators.

The “uses” of language thus conceived are important for my analysis of the ways in which the normative categories and practices of neoliberal capitalism are commented upon and renegotiated by workers through the use of laments and public outcries that seek to both create and engage the wider moral community in restoring some notion of “order”. Such utterances can become “political and social critiques” through which the discrepancies between the ideal social order and reality are brought to light (Gardner 2002: 39). More crucially however they can be generative of collective and individual identities (ibid: 32). Laments are rife with notions of moral rights and entitlements that often draw on some kind of imaginative understanding of a moral economy, but are also productive in that they constitute us as moral persons and challenge normative categories, regardless of whether or not they succeed in their explicit goals (Zivi 2012: 83).

Before proceeding to the discussion on methodology, I would like to make a final note here that I do not wish to consign the work of thinkers such as Harvey (2005) to the dustbin under the pretext that it is unjustified in its approach to neoliberalism as an “epochal and totalizing ... ubiquitous force” (Collier 2011: 10). If the logic of the latter is not ubiquitous in its effects and manifestations or the specific reactions it provokes among people, this has not made it any less forceful. The effects of the neoliberalization of Macedonian society have been very real and very dramatic. The state has been steadily withdrawing from spheres it previously governed. Special economic zones of exemption have become the jewel of economic development. Unions have been decimated. Workers’ legal rights have been eroded to increase the flexibility of labour (see Saveski, Apasiev, Kovachevski & Vasilev 2010). Standards of living have plummeted for a great many. True, people have come to grips with these new realities in various ways and have refused to simply roll over and passively take their lot in life.

But they have been placed in a situation where they have had to respond and adapt to changes that have touched on nearly every aspect of their lives.

Chapter II: The “Work” of Anthropology

2.1 Finding the “Fieldsite”

My field research was conducted in Shtip, a small township in Eastern Macedonia with a population of forty-eight thousand people, which make up 2.3 % of Macedonia total population 2.058 million. Compared to western Macedonia, it has a relatively ethnically homogenous population, with ethnic Macedonians making up 87 %, followed by Roma (4.5%), Turks (2.7%), and others. As a regional industrial hub, Shtip’s history of textile and garment production began in the 1950’s when Macedonia was part of the Federation of Socialist Yugoslav Republics. Whereas textile production has ceased completely, Shtip’s industrial belt houses 58 garment factories that employ over 45 % of the town’s active workforce. Nearly all production takes the form of outsourced processing, or *lon*, as it is locally referred to. The procurement of materials and designs is left to the buyers, leaving local factories to busy themselves only with assembling and shipping out garments in accordance with strict deadlines. In short, it is a town almost completely dominated by work and life in the garment sector. It is a precarious life, characterized by short term employment contracts designed to meet the needs of flexible demand for garments. Given this presence, it is no surprise that the garment industry is a constant and overwhelming object of reflection and inspection. As people ruminate on the consequences of the “transition” they inevitably end up scrutinizing all that which goes in and goes out of garment production, making it an almost ideal subject of anthropological inquiry.

I arrived in Shtip with the specific intention of conducting fieldwork in one of its numerous garment factories. In fact my initial ambition was to gain access to two factories of a different size so as to be able to contrast different production sites. It was,

however, by no means obvious that I would manage to gain access to even one, given the intense public scrutiny under which the garment sector finds itself. Many owners are suspicious of outsiders poking around in their affairs and weary of potential embarrassing leaks to the media.

This much I realized even before arriving in Shtip. I had spent the first month of fieldwork in the capital conducting some library research and other preparatory work, when I stumbled upon the existence of a documentary on Shtip's garment workers called simply "The Seamstresses", by a talented local filmmaker called Biljana Garvanlieva. Alas, the film was nowhere to be found for rent or purchase. After many attempts of contacting the filmmaker directly in order to obtain a copy I finally managed to arrange a meeting with her producer who was kind enough to explain that the film had to be withdrawn from circulation after receiving legal threats from Kole Patrakliski, the owner of the garment factory featured in the film. Patrakliski was also one of the main protagonists of the film and offered his full cooperation during the filming. After seeing the final cut however, he insisted that his words and actions had been taken out of context and threatened his public image. The main point of contention was a small excerpt in the thirty minute film showing Patrakliski in his luxury villa in Shtip, complete with an outdoor pool, lush lawns with sprinklers and various ornaments. The excerpt was used to allow viewers to experience the contrast in wealth and standards of living between himself and the women working in his factory. "Without that", the producer told me, "the film did not make sense." Unwilling to re-edit the film and fearing involvement in what could have become a protracted and expensive legal procedure, they decided to simply withdraw it and sacrifice more than a year's work.

Nonetheless, Patrakliski's reaction struck me as somewhat peculiar. After all, capitalist elites are usually far from diffident when it comes to acts of ostentatious displays of

affluence. Converting economic into “symbolic capital” through acts of conspicuous consumption is the very stuff of social legitimation. One can hardly imagine Bill Gates seeing potential controversy in disclosing the fact that he lives in a much more expensive house than some entry level programmer working in a Microsoft office in Austin, Texas. What Patrakliski’s reticence underlines is the “unfinished business” of capitalist transformation in Macedonian society and the high political sensitivity of emerging distinctions in the local community.

But it also made me aware of the possible pitfalls I might encounter in finding a research site. All the more so given the strict bureaucratic regulations in English universities regarding fieldwork and ethics, and the insistence on consent forms, information sheets and the like. The possibility of “going undercover” as, for example, Fernandez-Kelly (1983) did in her research on Mexican maquiladoras, is no longer an option that can get past any ethics review board. There was no other choice but to present myself in front of a factory building and ask to be seen by the manager, explain my research motives in full and offer every assurance that I had no intention of smearing their reputation or arousing trouble from the inside. But the question remained whether I would find a factory whose management was willing to risk full exposure of their internal operations to a complete stranger?

As expected, the strategy was initially fruitless and after a few attempts at different factories I was unable to even obtain a meeting with someone from management. However, I soon realized that I was going about it the wrong way. As so often is the case in Macedonia, the more pressing issue when establishing a relation with someone is “Who sent you?” rather than “Why have you come?” In other words I was lacking the appropriate social lubricant in the form of a “recommendation” from someone “known”. As luck would have it, getting a recommendation was the least of my problems, as my

host in Shtip (a close friend of my family) was a well-connected physician. I had initially resisted asking for one as I was well aware that it might involve my “patron” into a cycle of favours and counter-favours that characterized the local economy of informal exchange. A favour, after all, is the equivalent of a gift, and to accept it is to bind oneself to the giver.

After receiving every assurance that it was “not a problem” I finally accepted his offer to place me in touch with Mr Samorich, the manager of one of the town’s largest factories owned by the brother of a close friend of my host. Already the following day we made our way to the factory so that I could be introduced. Once inside we were led by the secretary to a large meeting room overlooking the shop floor where we were asked to wait for the manager. Whilst waiting I gazed with excitement upon what was later to become my main fieldsite. After a few minutes Mr Samorich entered the room and introduced himself. My host presented me and I proceeded to explain myself as an anthropologist studying in England and to outline the nature of my research. Mr Samorich listened carefully and expressed some doubts upon hearing my request to be given an unpaid job in the factory for the duration of my fieldwork. “You would have to be here every day?” he asked with amazement.

His incredulity was unsurprising. I was certainly not the first researcher to approach the factory, but usually a researcher’s role would be limited to interviewing the manager and perhaps receiving a guided tour of the factory and leaving it at that. Research itself is commonly perceived as an activity taking place in university libraries or making formal interviews with influential individuals instead of stitching garments for months. I tried as best I could to explain the basic tenets of the ethnographic method and the virtues of qualitative research, all of which must have sounded odd.

In any case, he told me he would have to think about it and get back to me. After a week I was half certain of having reached another dead end. Nonetheless I decided to give Mr Samorich a call to ask whether he had made a decision and to my astonishment he agreed to meet me once again in the factory to discuss the details of my role. We agreed that I would start the following day in the upstairs planning office and then work my way down to the shop floor. The arrangement suited me as I thought it would allow me further insights of the overall division of labour in the factory. And so began my 10 months of fieldwork. But what exactly, we may ask at this point, is a “field” and what kind of “work” are anthropologists expected to do there? So far I have used these terms unreflectively and I believe a few more explanations are in order so as to situate the research on which this thesis is based.

2.2 What Field and What Work?

In spite of all the paradigm shifts that anthropology has undergone over the years, the notion of fieldwork has endured. Even more, as Gupta and Ferguson (1997: 1) note, having done “fieldwork” is almost a necessary precondition for being recognized as a “real anthropologist”, as opposed to a mere “armchair theorist”. Anthropological knowledge is only considered genuine if it can be shown to rest on data collected in the “field”. Yet what exactly is meant by the “field” is a matter of ongoing debate. As Appadurai has noted, contemporary anthropologists do not have the luxury of assuming spatially bounded and culturally homogenous “local” communities that can be studied holistically (1991: 96). In a world defined by the global flows of people and goods the task of demarcating the boundaries of a “field” is bound to be futile. What does it mean, for example, to study the local culture of garment factory workers, whose lives are so

clearly entangled with an industry of global proportions, and where decisions by government officials, international organizations, or CEO's in faraway places can determine local outcomes?

One way to reconcile this discrepancy is to approach “fieldwork” not just as a mode of accumulating experiential knowledge, but as “location-work”, i.e. an ongoing project where spending time with and talking to individuals in a given setting is accompanied by “reading newspapers, analyzing government documents, observing the activities of elites, and tracking the logic of transnational development agencies and corporations” (Ferguson & Gupta 1997: 37), and also, research into historical social processes (Des Chene 1997: 67). This much is reflected in my own assortment of “methods”. Although I spent a year of my research degree in “the field”, the chapters in this thesis are based on data that is not exclusively derived from this period of research. Chapter III is an historical account based on secondary literature sources, whereas Chapters IV, V and VI draw on a combination of government and union reports, newspaper articles, documents from international development organizations as well as interviews and personal conversations with so called “informants”. Chapters VII and VIII are based on interviews, conversations and all the experiential data obtained through my interactions with people inside the factory and around Shtip, which can roughly be summed up as long term “participant observation”. In other words my “field” of research, although grounded in the everyday lives of industrial workers, extends epistemologically, politically and historically into a number of open ended directions, that transform the research project into a potentially never ending work in progress.

2.2.1 Participant Observation

It is important to note that even though participant observation is still a widespread term in the conduct of fieldwork it is now loosely employed to identify a combination of more specific methods, rather than Malinowski's original usage of the term. For Malinowski participation appears to have been limited to enjoying the company of the natives and partaking in some of their games and amusements (Holy 1995: 22), while non-intrusive observation ("fly on the wall") was in fact his main data collecting method. Similarly, for Radcliffe-Brown direct observation constituted the main scientific method for gathering empirical data from which the social scientist can draw general conclusions about the larger structure and network of social relations (ibid: 20). Excessive participation was even undesirable as the ethnographer's presence could threaten the "natural" behaviour of people in a given situation. The data thus observed through this positivist framework offers itself as the 'facts' of social life, and leads the researcher to focus exclusively on social interactions and structure while neglecting notions of meaning that cannot be observed, i.e culture (ibid: 25).

This brings us to the more interpretive and participatory side of fieldwork. Without grasping culture we remain unable to understand the meaning that drives and motivates social action. As this meaning cannot be inferred by mere observation, the researcher must immerse herself far more intimately in the practices and affairs of the people being studied in order to build relations with them. Meaning is after all a shared resource and always in the process of (re)production in our relations with others (ibid: 28-9). Some anthropologists (Wacquant 2004; Hsu 2006; Barber 2003) have taken participation a step further by stressing the embodied aspect of cultural knowledge. Access to this is granted only by a complete bodily and sensual immersion in "the cosmos under investigation ... that ... makes it possible for the sociologist to appropriate in and

through practice the cognitive, aesthetic, ethical and conative schemata that those who inhabit that cosmos engage in their everyday deeds” (Wacquant 2004: viii).

Anthropologists, Barber writes, “live their research [as] the supreme example of embodied knowledge” (2003: 149).

For good measure, I did my best to immerse myself in the everyday patterns of garment labour by spending at least four days a week on the shop floor doing a variety of chores and participating in all the forms of sociability that take place between workers throughout the working day. I commuted to and from the factory using the hired bus transport that serviced most of the workers and socialized whenever possible with my colleagues after work, though mostly on weekends. I carried a small notebook with me at all times and used it regularly during the first weeks which I mostly spent in the upstairs office. It was during my time in the office that I was most visible as an “observer” precisely because I had nothing to do except make inquiries, observe, listen and take notes. There were no tasks I could “participate” in. Before long, the office employees began speaking to the notebook rather than the ethnographer and would say things like “Write this down Aleksandar!” whenever they felt they had something to say to a Western European readership, or give each other warnings such as “Be careful what you say he’s probably writing it down” whenever complaints about management became too vocal. I would of course reassure them of my commitment to anonymity and remind them of their “right” to opt out of participating in the research (a “right” that fortunately no one claimed). The lunchbreak provided some crucial relief from such awkwardness, through various informalities such as banter, sharing food and discussions on off work topics.

However, once on the shop floor I found note-taking to be cumbersome and alienating. I spent most of my time in the cutting section for the simple reason that there were a

variety of tasks there that did not require a great deal of training, which meant that I could begin to participate almost immediately in the labour process. Given the qualities of manual labour, the social ambience on the shop floor was emphatically corporeal in the sense that sociability was dependent on shared bodily experiences of toil, smell, food and sexual horseplay. My immediate judgement was that drifting around and taking notes *without* participating in the production process would not allow me to develop the closeness I thought was necessary in order to tap into the pool of shared meanings and practices that circulated on the shop floor.

The strategy I developed then was to dedicate most of my time to the social life of cutting fabric, and pour the days' experiences into text as soon as I would get home. Sometimes I would also take occasional breaks to the canteen to dictate notes into my smartphone which, thanks to useful technology, would get immediately transcribed into an online document that I could later edit – a great time saving device. My daily routine started at the bus stop where I waited for the transport to the factory and chatted with workers doing the same. Once in the factory I would join one or another group of workers for the ritual banter that lasted until the start of the shift (around ten minutes). Once the shift started at 7:30 there would be little opportunity for lengthy conversations although joking and flirting were not uncommon between workers, though it had to be skillfully done so as not to attract too much attention from management. Most of the conversation I had in the factory occurred during the two breaks, one at 10am and the lunch break at 1pm. While on the shop floor I refrained as much as possible from making friendly interaction with management so as to avoid becoming dissociated from manual-workers, though I kept making the occasional visit to the upstairs office for a coffee break.

I should probably say at this point that in spite of all my efforts I never managed to become a “body and soul” garment worker. My colleagues never lost sight of the fact that, unlike them, my “being there” was provisional and a mere extension of my research project in England, which meant that I always had one foot out the door. Time and again I would be reminded that *I* did not *have* to be there, and that well-educated middle class Macedonians from the capital had no business cutting garments in a factory in Shtip. But while producing some incredulity (and mockery), my insistence on sharing and participating in whatever tasks management threw on the cutting section, gradually transformed my presence into an amicable curiosity. Friendships were formed, gifts exchanged and as time passed by, my integration in the social activities of workers increased (see also, De Neve 2006: 78). Before long I was able to extend my interactions with workers beyond the factory and into the local bars, cafes and sporting grounds, where I could also meet and exchange words with people from all walks of life.

2.2.2 Interviews, Memories and Scattered Narratives

Whilst in the field I also conducted a total of five lengthy recorded interviews that included two factory owners, two managers (one current and one retired) and one retired worker. I also conducted a formal interview with two former union officials who allowed me to take copious notes but refused to be recorded. All of these materials have been used here to varying degrees. My initial intention was to also gather a solid number of life-histories from workers but I unfortunately had to abandon this idea as unworkable. Whenever I brought up the topic and asked workers whether they would be willing to offer a sequential narrative of their lived experiences and future expectations I

ran into a stubborn reluctance and a lot of raised eyebrows. This was in stark contrast to people of authority, such as owners, managers and union officials who are more than accustomed to giving interviews to researchers. As for people on the shop floor, my initial assumption was that workers simply did not appreciate how their lives could possibly be important enough to warrant such interest. Indeed, as Keesing writes, people are often willing to offer reflective autobiographies only if they are at some level convinced that their lives are worth narrating, and even then with considerable social support (1985: 37). In a way this made a lot of sense considering that workers often thought of themselves as having no influence whatsoever on the larger events that shaped their lives (Gardner 2002: 32).

On countless occasions workers spoke to me about how their thoughts and actions were not relevant to how their lives unfold. I recall listening to one cab driver complaining about declining living standards to which I said “Well that is how we’ve made things today.” His immediate response was “No! That is how they made it for us!” In the factory the usual response to my incessant demands for workers’ opinions on events was “Who cares what I think?” At times such statements made me feel exasperated as they left me with little information and unable to grasp how and why an entire working population could become so resigned to an experience of themselves as little more than passive objects in the hands of the dominant? Benjamin appears to offer an answer when he writes that “the concept of life is given its due only if everything that has a history of its own, and is not merely the setting of history, is credited with life” (1968: 71). One could argue that it is precisely this crediting (i.e. *recognition*), that has been taken away with the inglorious downfall of the iconic socialist worker. No longer flaunted as the vanguard of history, its makers and owners, workers have now become the setting - the lifeless stuff over which history writes itself. It should have come as

little surprise that my “asking” for a unified plot containing a lifetime of experiences, hopes and desires was perceived as somewhat odd (and perhaps to an extent threatening).

But there is another and slightly less gloomy layer behind this resignation that relates to my approach to personhood. Narrating the self as the main protagonist in a sequence of historical events requires a certain level of separation from these events. It requires a certain understanding of the self as an internally coherent and autonomous individual that “owns” her experiences and life choices. Most workers in Shtip do not see themselves as individuals who are the exclusive writers of their own lives, nor do they perceive this in itself to be a particular problem. In this sense, questions such as “Who cares what I think?” do not bemoan the loss of autonomy but the loss of mutuality and relatedness to others through which actions and selves receive recognition and become valued. They bemoan the state of abjection and reflect the experience of people being cast out and left to fend for themselves. My interpretation here rests on Graeber’s definition of value as the way in which “the importance of one’s own actions register in the imagination – always, by translation into some larger social language or system of meaning, by being integrated into some larger [imagined] social whole” (2007: 68).

As time went by it became clear that people were in fact more than willing to share scattered stories, experiences and memories, all of which were related to and shaped by the context of present events and in the presence of certain others. Some of the older workers would happily recall the superior quality of the canteen in socialist enterprises whenever we sat down to eat in during the break. Others often liked to reminisce how differently managers behaved when the workers’ councils ran the factory after an outburst by the foreman or anyone else from management. Younger workers with no direct experience of socialist work regimes relied on a different idiom to express much

of the same frustrations, usually by making references to the developed “West”. Memories, jokes and commentaries would erupt suddenly, provoked by some fleeting incident and disappear in a flash. Such stories I had to partially collect and assemble (write down, dictate, commit to memory) and analyze as much as possible within the context in which they were being uttered. I became particularly attuned to the way in which exchanging stories and objects could invoke or create a shared emotion, imaginative understanding or experience that comes out of shared practices and also attributes value and meaning to such practices. It is this interplay between praxis and the imagination that formal interviews are less able to capture for which participant observation is far more apposite.

2.5 Positionality, Reflexivity and the Politics of Knowledge

All this is not to say that direct engagement with subjects gives the ethnographer an authoritative access or a “hot-line” to some “undistorted reality” (Willis 2000: 113). The simple act of “being there” and witnessing events first hand has long ceased to provide the unshakeable foundations of ethnographic authority (de Laine 2000: 178). Much has been written about the power and subjectivity of the ethnographer when it comes to selecting ethnographic data, obtaining a partial perspective, uncritically using preconceived conceptual tools for interpretation and deploying clever literary devices for the representation of ethnographic materials (Clifford & Marcus 1986). These are all valid concerns. But while it remains necessary to keep on questioning the ethnographer’s positionality and textual authority, it is equally important to avoid relapsing into some kind of hermeneutical solipsism that reduces ethnography to an exploration of its own limitations (e.g. What *can* we say? What right do *we* have to

represent others?). Ethnography must continue to speak to the world outside itself if it is to retain its relevancy as an investigative project. And this means, to paraphrase Thompson, that the ethnographer ought to be entitled to a number of assumptions: that the evidence under investigation exists in a “real” determinate way independently of its existence in our forms of thought, that this evidence is subject to real social and historical processes, and that some approximate understanding of these processes is a legitimate object of ethnographic inquiry (1979: 220).

Ethnography itself is key to understanding these processes insofar as it concerns itself with ‘teasing out the hidden symbolic, moral, or pragmatic logics that underlie certain types of social action; how people’s habits and actions make sense in ways that they are not themselves completely aware of ... and then try to figure out what the larger implications of what they are (already) doing might be’ (Graeber 2007: 305-6). The fact that this knowledge is by definition partial and incomplete does not mean that it can never attain the status of real knowledge (Graeber 2007b: 390). In fact, it is only by being partial that we can ever know it is “real”, since totalizing forms of knowledge can only exist as abstract thought experiments with no relation to the fleeting quality of real life processes (ibid). To deny this and adopt an extreme relativist position would be politically disastrous insofar as we wish to critically engage with structures of power in the world. In other words, while remaining critical of our own concepts, we must resist the imperative to “opt out of analysis of any kind of the links between the informants’ subjective models and the nature of the social formations [of domination, exploitation and exclusion] which are not always apparent to those informants” (Yelvington 1990: 330). This means that knowledge must be allowed to flow in both directions and that a research area, is therefore not just a “field” for collecting data, but “a site for strategic

intervention” where the links between different forms of knowledge are forged (Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 39). With this in mind we can now depart towards “the field”.

2.6 A Brief Guide to the Chapters

The following two chapters (III and IV), will provide an overview of the historical making and unmaking of the industrial working class in Macedonia. I deal mainly with the social and economic particularities of Yugoslav self-managed socialism and the transition to a free market economy during the nineties. Chapters V and VI explore the tensions and wider implications generated by the transition, and the responses of workers within a context of total economic decline. My focus in this section is on the public debates and encounters between workers, employers and the state, and the struggle to define the changing relationship between them. Chapters VII and VIII will explore the everyday lives of workers at in Stichko, one of Shtip’s largest garment factories. There I explore how categories of class and personhood are negotiated within the working environment, and relate this to the wider process of socio-economic transformation.



Fig. 1. View of Shtip's central area



Fig. 2. View of Shtip's industrial zone in winter

Part II: The Making and Unmaking of an Industrial Workforce

Chapter III: The Rise of Self-Management

3.1 Introduction

The history of Macedonia has been a richly explored subject, which in its greatest part has not been the history of a state and its people. The name itself has most commonly been used to refer to a region in the south-central Balkans with historically shifting boundaries and peoples. One often encounters the use of the term “Geographic Macedonia” as a seemingly politically neutral way to invoke the “natural” boundaries of an apolitical geographic space, only to obscure the reality that there is nothing particularly “geographic” about Macedonia. The most “stately” and renowned association of the name is with the homeland of Alexander the Great whose military exploits have provided the fodder for many contemporary nationalist conflicts over his legacy. After the rapid dissolution of Alexander’s empire, Macedonia fell under Roman rule where it remained as part of the Roman and then Eastern Roman or Byzantine empires for the next fifteen centuries. Throughout its history as a Roman province the precise administrative and geographic boundaries of Macedonia varied considerably as did the peoples that populated the region (see Rossos 2008: 17). The most significant and lasting demographic change occurred with the arrival of Slavic tribes who crossed the Danube to permanently settle within the borders of the Byzantine Empire (Curta 2001).

In their various incarnations the Slavic peoples contributed to the rise and fall of many feudal kingdoms of the “Byzantine commonwealth” as Obolensky (1971) put it, whether Serbian or Bulgarian before being all swept up by the spread of the Ottoman Empire in the fifteenth century. Under the Ottomans Macedonia vanished as an administrative unit and became part of Rumelia, the empire’s largest European province

containing most of the Balkan Peninsula south of the Sava and Danube rivers. Ottoman power gradually began to decline from the 17th century onwards and by the early 19th century the Empire had ceded large portions of its European territories to Russia and Austria-Hungary. As the wave of nationalism swept through the Balkans in the 19th century, further concessions were made to emerging nation states within its boundaries. With the help and backing of European powers the empire lost Thessaly and the Peloponnesus to the new Greek state in 1830, followed by the formation of an independent Serbia in 1867 and Bulgaria in 1878. This left present day Albania, Thrace and what once more became commonly referred to as Macedonia as the last Ottoman European possessions.

The history of the region following the “awakening” of nationals has been the subject of extensive research, documenting the complex ethnic, religious and political affiliations of its inhabitants and their role in the struggle of neighbouring states to further their territorial expansion at the expense of the Ottomans. Many journalists and policy-makers have looked at the history of ethnicity and religion and the antagonisms of various national projects as a charter for understanding late 20th century politics in the Balkans. The shortcomings of such efforts have been studiously researched by anthropologists among others (see Cowan & Brown 2000; Todorova 2009), but given that this study is primarily concerned with *industrial* labour, its social history and its present social and cultural characteristics, it is this history that I will tackle in this chapter. The task will be to draw the contours of the “moral economy” of contemporary industrial labour in Macedonia and place it in its historical context; to reconstruct the historical conditions that shaped the making and re-making of industrial labour and to tease out the cultural and symbolic struggles that have re-defined the meaning of work and the social relationships between workers, employers and the state. The chapter will

take us through the shaping of an industrial working class within the framework of Yugoslav Socialism, with a focus on the concept of self-management. I pay particular attention to the distinctions between official representations of self-management and lived practices, and I accommodate the dimension of consumption as a vital element of ideological legitimacy. I pursue this history in order to make the argument that far from a utopian state of social equality, Yugoslav socialism nurtured a particular version of “social inequality” in which the related, embedded self becomes recognized as a moral subject within the wider webs of dependence. This is an important step that will help us approach contemporary experiences of and everyday reflections on labour not as an acute “condition” of the present but as historical “events” that acquire meaning only “within the context of a larger surrounding plot” (Morris 1997: 37).

3.2 A Modern Socialist Republic

The project of industrialization and modernization in Macedonia began with the end of the Second World War and the creation of Socialist Yugoslavia with Macedonia as one of its constituent republics. This was itself hardly a probable outcome, but for favourable political circumstances. After the Balkan Wars of 1912-13 Ottoman Macedonia was divided between Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia. The current territory of the republic became the southernmost province of the expanding Serbian state. Four years later, it was to form part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later to be renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Following brief experiments with parliamentary democracy, the kingdom was maintained as much by internal oppression as by European “balance of power” politics in the aftermath of the Great War. Internally it was plagued by a constant crisis of legitimacy (see Benson 2001) and eventually

collapsed during the Second World War under the pressure of various national factions fighting for statehood.

Various groups and ideologues, with often conflicting interests, had been actively promoting the idea of an independent Macedonia since the late nineteenth century, though none had managed to muster the organizational capacity and popular appeal to turn this into a viable project. All this changed with the arrival of the Yugoslav Communist Party on the political scene. The ideals of socialism were not new to revolutionaries agitating for an independent Macedonia in spite of the absence of local communist party organizations. This vacuum was gradually filled as Bulgarian, Greek and Yugoslav CP branches competed for the loyalty of local communists whose socialist ideals went hand in hand with the struggle for national liberation (albeit what “nation” and whose “liberation” were hardly a matter of consensus among the local populace.) The eventual triumph of the Yugoslav branch was largely owed to the skilful military and political leadership of Tito (see Benson 2001: 88). Under his guidance, the Yugoslav Partisans emerged from their shadowy and largely insignificant existence during the interwar period, as the best organized and most suitable ally in the war against fascism in the Balkans. With the help of Allied military and logistical assistance the Partisans waged a successful guerilla war that crippled German military efforts in the region. By the end of the war they had staked an unassailable claim as the only legitimate political force to rule the territory of the old Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

Throughout the war the CPY strenuously pushed for the implementation of the Comintern program for Macedonia, which largely meant an ideologically inspired social and economic transformation with the usual socialist overtones of equality and social justice. More importantly, the CPY endorsed a national program of self-determination for Macedonians that included statehood, albeit as part of a communist federation of

equal republics within a redefined Yugoslavia. This was enough to attract the loyalty of not only communist sympathizers but also members of the right, who saw in the CPY the means to pursue their primary goal of national independence. In response, the CPY abolished its branch organization in Macedonia and in March 1943 replaced it with the more independent, though closely monitored, Communist Party of Macedonia (CPM). Carried by military successes against German and Bulgarian occupiers, the CPM swiftly began to establish its authority by forming local self-administration councils in liberated areas and establishing the first elementary schools and religious services in the local Macedonian tongue (Rossos 2008: 194).

Such moves also facilitated military recruitment and transformed a hitherto local resistance movement into a formidable force engaging in large scale clashes with German and Bulgarian forces as well as Serb nationalists. By the summer of 1944 most of the western and southern parts of what is today's Macedonia were liberated and the CPM organized the first elections of village, town and district National Liberation Councils. The delegates from these councils were to participate on the 2nd of August that year on the first Anti-Fascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Macedonia (ASNOM) and discuss the foundations of the future Macedonian state. The conclave ended with the historic proclamation of the People's Democratic Republic of Macedonia within federal Yugoslavia. A provisional presidium of 22 members was chosen to perform all legislative and executive tasks until the following session of ASNOM during which the country's political and legislative structures were aligned with those of the Yugoslav federation (ibid).

The making of a new Socialist Yugoslavia out of the rubble left by the "fratricide" that tore the old Kingdom apart was always going to be fraught with innumerable difficulties. The communists inherited an impoverished and largely rural country where

three quarters of the population were employed in agriculture, with pockets of industry in the northern republics of Slovenia and Croatia and a largely subsistence agriculture population in the southern regions such as Macedonia and Kosovo (Hoffman 1959: 555; Jeffries 1993: 364). Writing for the *Geographic Journal* in 1952, Wilkinson could still describe Macedonia as a place where “the process of industrialization and reform have not yet destroyed the illusion that in this part of Europe time has stood still for four hundred years” (1952: 26).

The task of state building was not made easier by the Tito-Stalin split in 1948 that polarized relations between communist Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union and saw Yugoslavia's expulsion from the Communist International (*ibid*). The source of the antagonism was Tito's desire to act independently from Moscow on the socialist stage as a key figure in a much larger south Slav alliance that included Bulgaria, but also the non-Slav nations such as Albania, Romania and Greece (see Rusinow 1977: 24-34; Jović 2000: 60). Yugoslav involvement and open support for the communists in the Greek civil war, created a volatile political situation in the wake of Truman's promise to protect Greece and Turkey from the threat of Communism, and clashed with Soviet plans for a stable Balkans and a de-escalation of hostilities in the region (Jović 2000: 60). Tito's refusal to back down resulted in an unrelenting campaign by Stalin to isolate the Yugoslav Communists from the Cominform both politically and economically, which created the conditions for Yugoslav revisionism and rapprochement with the West.

3.3 Industrializing the Yugoslav Way

Early Yugoslav reforms mirrored Soviet style policies, both economically and politically. The first five-year plan was introduced in 1947 and was aimed at rapid industrialization and collectivization of agriculture (Woodward 1995: 65), administered by a top down centralized Party. This implied centrally planned solutions for all economic issues such as valuation, organization of production, income distribution and investment (Mencinger 2000: 120). The standard aim of such modernizing policies was to “transform the under-developed, predominantly agricultural, capitalist society, into an industrial socialist society” (ibid). The construction of the Stalinist dictatorship of the proletariat however was stopped in its tracks in late June 1948 by the expulsion of the CPY from the Cominform.

It was in the context of these events that the CPY’s two main ideologues, Edvard Kardelj and Milovan Djilas, sought to convince Tito that in order for Yugoslavia to truly assert its independence from Soviet influence it was necessary to achieve an ideological as well as a political separation as a safeguard from external interference and a base for internal cohesion (Woodward 1995: 159; Jović 2000: 71). This precipitated the shift from attacks on Stalin to attacks on Stalinism and formed the basis for the Yugoslav opposition to Soviet style bureaucratization and centralization, and the move towards a socialist democracy with self-management and social ownership as its key components. It was meant to achieve both political and economic equality for the working classes “based on the principle of full autonomy in deciding the outcomes of one's own labour” (ibid: 77). On an economic level this meant complete worker's control and collective ownership of enterprises, and a democratically, as opposed to a centrally, planned economy (Lefebvre 1975: 17). The state did however reserve the right to make interventions such as temporary wage and price freezes, and retained the

right to implement temporary management boards that overrode the principles of self-management in order to restructure loss-making firms (Jeffries 1993: 365).

The main idea though, remained that of political democracy through economic participation. The model endorsed a complex system of representation at local, republican and federal levels through worker's councils, delegations and self-managing interest communities (ibid: 79). Later in his memoirs Djilas wrote that Tito was initially hesitant about the idea, and although he eventually embraced it he remained sceptical of its virtues for some time (see Rusinow 1977: 51). Even Djilas and Kardelj had their disagreements about how to exactly achieve the 'withering away of the state' that was the logical conclusion of the process of self-management. Kardelj's pragmatic view that ideas are worth little unless backed by power and organization (Kardelj 1978: 47) clashed with Djilas' anarcho-syndicalist outlook that earned him his expulsion from all party activities by 1954 and brief imprisonment in 1957 before ultimately becoming exiled (see Rusinow 1977: 81-7).

In Kardelj's (and Tito's) view it was necessary to maintain a strong and organized party that would ensure the realization of the "best interests" of the people even if the majority were unaware of what these might be, or refused to support their realization (Kardelj 1978: 212-3). In other words the party was the necessary vanguard of socialist reform, responsible for the proper education and reproduction of the socialist community (ibid). To this end, the official program of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia stated that 'communists ... must educate the people to take a greater, more direct and more independent share in the management of society, and to think and act in a socialist manner, until the very last citizen has learned to manage the affairs of the community' (in Jović 2000: 76). In spirit, this somewhat contradictory policy was meant to be a reversal of the more paternalistic Soviet model of a state-party system that both

represents the people and is responsible for managing and owning assets on their behalf (see Alexander 2004: 254; Verdery 1996: 25).

This principle was extended to the political organization of the country and in accordance with Kardelj's notion of a direct participatory democracy, whose long term objective was to socialize all state functions at the level of producers (Kardelj 1978: 93). The republics of the federation were after the reforms of 1952 divided into 3,834 communes grouped in 327 counties. The communes were administered by people's councils which were comprised of: a Political Chamber (usually CP representatives) elected by direct universal suffrage; a Council of Producers, elected by working people in their place of work in the productive sector; and a Chamber of Local Communities (self-managed organisations dealing with issues of local significance, i.e. environmental projects, welfare etc.) (Rusinow 1977: 69; Simmie & Hale 1978: 707). The voting power of delegates representing an economic sector in the Council of Producers was proportional to that sector's contribution to national product, which was meant to operate as an incentive to producers to increase their economic output. It also meant that anyone without a job in the social sector could not fully participate in the political process (*ibid*), which could be used by political structures to punish or isolate political opponents by simply restricting access to employment. In short, employment did not merely provide access to a job but to an entire set of political and economic rights that came to determine one's status in society (*ibid*; Vušković 1976: 38). As such they did not constitute rights of citizenship but of "producers" of socially owned capital (Benson 1973: 41).

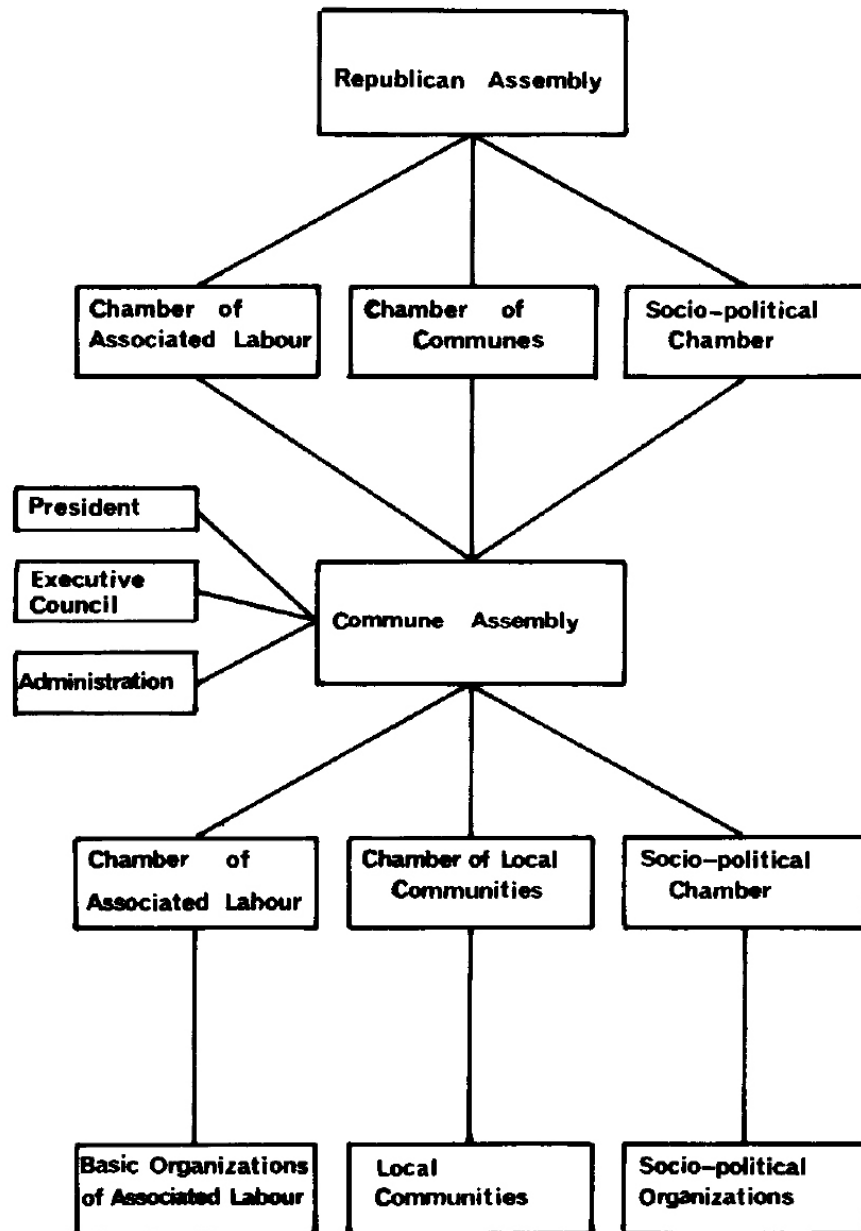


Fig. 3. Formal relationships and political organization of the self-managing community (figure taken from Simmie & Hale 1978)

3.3.1 The Peak of Self-Management

Economic performance in the sixties and seventies was more than solid and growing at an average rate of six percent per year. Nevertheless, the increasingly large size of some enterprises created concerns that they were too big to be steered by self-managing

workers or that they were increasingly dependent on managerial and state direction (Jeffries 1993: 365). This encouraged the federal leadership to give the self-management system further constitutional impetus by introducing the Associated Labour Act (ALA) in 1976, (although it had been on the drawing board since 1971). The main organizational change at the level of enterprises brought by the ALA was their division into “Basic Units of Associated Labour” (BOALs). These were the “smallest production units of an enterprise capable of independent accounting because they produced a marketable product” (Woodward 1995: 277). These units, although autonomous, were too small to operate independently and associated their labour with other units in the enterprise to form a “Work Organisation”, usually consisting of three to four BOALs and one “Work Community” (administrative unit). The largest forms of associating were the “complex organizations” which often consisted of over a hundred BOALs (Jović 2000: 131; Jeffries 1993: 366).

Politically, workers had considerable rights as decision makers through their BOALs. The ALA stipulated that any decision making process in the enterprise had to function on the principle of total consensus from its constitutive BOALs, which meant that half the workers in one BOAL could veto thousands of other workers in their BOALs if they disagreed with a majority decision (Jovic 2000: 132). The manager was elected by a two thirds majority in the workers’ council after choosing from a list of nominees drawn up by a nominating committee. Half the members of the committee consisted of political appointees and included representatives of local government, one third were appointed by the workers’ council, and the rest by the trade union and local authorities or communes (Jeffries 1993: 366).

Officially, the purpose of the ALA was: to further enable workers to take part in the decision making process in their enterprises; to give workers responsibility over social

reproduction by controlling all resources of social capital necessary for this reproduction; and to further decentralize the state and pass over many of its functions to workers' councils (Jović 2000: 130; cf. Kardelj 1978: 23-4). The ALA was supposed to eventually replace the state constitution and was in a way the culmination of the Yugoslav ideology of self-management (ibid).

In the spirit of the Marxist “who makes it owns it” motto, what the Yugoslav leadership sought to create was a new concept of labour that no longer recognized unpropertied wage earners and tried to eliminate the distinction of labour as an actor separate from capital. Central to the new approach was the idea of the property owner as a producer of value and “its operative principle – the *incentive to increase produced value*” derived from the rights of “political and economic decision making” (Woodward 1995: 166; italics in original).

The term “property owner” used here stands for the political and economic rights over the assets of public sector firms. Property was not owned in the strict sense by enterprises or the state for that matter. The state had in fact officially abolished the concept of state property in the early fifties and declared all capital assets to be “socially” owned (Uvalić 1992: 73). This concept of “social property” stipulated that capital was owned by society as a whole and the constitution of 1974 that set the grounds for the ALA explicitly stated that “no one has property rights of the social means of production – neither socio-political communities, nor organizations of associated labour, nor groups of citizens, nor individuals” (cited in Uvalić 1992: 73). In other words, the property of workers, i.e. what they “owned”, was their “individual rights to their social status with its political rights and economic benefits, or the collective rights to control [socially owned] economic resources” (Woodward 1995: 30; cf. Kardelj 1978: 84). These rights meant that producers could participate in decisions

regarding the creation and disposition of surplus value in the enterprise, and so establish an individual economic interest in the surplus growth of the enterprise as a whole. The 1958 official program of the League of Communists explicitly stated that: “Through [self-]management [producers] realize their personal interests every day: higher wages, a higher personal and general social standard of living” (cited in, Zukin 1975: 62).

It might seem odd that the party leadership did not deem it problematic to adopt such an explicit liberal principle of economic interest as the motive of social good, but it was assumed that by extending rights over property and capital to workers, any potential conflict between them would thus be eliminated (Woodward 1995: 166). The problem of labour alienation emerging in production would thus be effectively resolved (Supek 1975: 5). Instead of capital employing labour, self-managed socialism was to be a system where labour employs capital (Horvat 1975: 232). Diligence among workers was to become a mere consequence of self-interest created by this relationship. Since the system was seen as self-regulatory, the state could also reduce the expenditure on non-productive labour (Zukin 1975: 55).

Essentially, the worker-managed enterprise was to be a mechanism for disciplining workers, increasing productivity and reducing costs in accordance with market demands, whilst retaining its socialist credentials. Whereas Taylorism insisted that in order to maximize production it was necessary to completely separate work and thought and delegate the latter to management (see Braverman 1998: 79), the Yugoslav leadership announced the very opposite. Precisely by extending the rights of workers over capital and the instruments of production, workers would efficiently control their own labour and the manner of its performance (Horvat 1975: 236). For instance, it was assumed that workers would “think long-term” and “voluntarily” opt to reduce their

demands for higher wages to avoid threatening vital resources for future investments, i.e. their future income and the risk of unemployment (Woodward 1995: 167).

3.3.2 Was it Ever?

The system however never lived up to the expectations that grew around its democratic decision sharing principles for several reasons. On the one hand, managers were elected by employees and their usual role of making a profit had to be negotiated with government interference in price regulations, import quotas, labour control and worker demands for higher wages (Benson 1973: 108-9). On the other hand, they also had almost complete control over investment priorities and income distribution, in spite of the political rights of workers.

Jović, suggests that the BOALisation of the economy in effect reduced workers' participation to their immediate BOALs, rather than any higher level (ibid: 131), which brought about further fragmentation of the working population. The latter was already divided along republican categories after the 1974 constitution that gave republics total control over their local economies (see Woodward 1995: 311). In contrast, the managerial elite could enter industry wide alliances on a federal level that were more often than not highly influential in policy making processes. This was particularly true for export oriented enterprises on whose performance the federal budgets so heavily depended. This created a system wherein the independent interests of labour, unless conflated with those of management, could not be represented beyond the individual enterprise or republic (ibid: 322).

At the most immediate level workers were politically disarmed through the supposedly “neutral” language of technology and the “scientific” organization of the production

process as set out by the “experts” and in stark accordance with Braverman’s (1998) critique of capitalist production. The increasing reliance on technical experts became an integral part of the ideology of self-management and gradually acquired dominant overtones. A key factor was the increasing emphasis on economic performance and the continuous growth in productive outputs as a driving policy for the Yugoslav leadership. From the 60’s onwards self-management was treated by state ideologues as both the pinnacle of socialism and the means for achieving economic growth (Zukin 1975: 63). The term came to symbolize both the idealism of socialist revolution and the pragmatism that prioritises economic development (ibid).

In 1965 the government partially relaxed its control over the finances of enterprises in order to encourage markets as the final arbiters of economic success under the motto “Reward according to the results of work.” The Ninth Party Congress held in 1969 delivered the objectives of the CPY in terms that officially made economic growth the dominant priority and defined the task of the party in ominously technocratic terms. In the years that lay ahead the CPY was to:

“fight for the completion of existing and the development of new forms of self-managing decision-making in work organizations; for the modernization of the process of preparing, making and carrying out decisions; for the development of contemporary information systems; for the scientifically- analytically based plans, programs, and decisions; for the continual perfection of cadres and their affirmation on the basis of creativity and the results of work” (in, Zukin 1975: 63.)

The resolution appeared closer to the spirit of Henry Ford and was the cause of some concern among idealists that the CPY’s policies were veering dangerously away from more traditional socialist goals such as solidarity and the fight against all forms of inequality. The resolution of the CPY institutionalized the idea that society needs

technocrats and economists to lead the way towards the ultimate realization of self-management. Thus conceived the idea of self-management tried to juggle both views. It would appease the pragmatists by stressing the immediate necessity of economic development and the idealists by projecting “true” self-management as a future ideal to be reached through growth and a constant improvement in the quality of living standards (Zukin 1975: 71). However by doing so priority was given to economic rather than socialist development resulting in the reduction of participation from below into a mere formality whilst cementing the political authority of technical experts. When I interviewed Joncho in 2013, a retired manager of the engineering department of Macedonia’s garment producing giant Astibo, he reiterated the influence of skilled technical staff and management over workers:

“As the manager who has a function, who gets a salary to think about the development and the strategy of the Work Organization, I have to, if I decide to buy a new machine or introduce some new technology, I have to have a decision of approval from the Workers’ Council. Without their approval I could end up in jail if I buy a new machine. It’s not important how much benefit there will be from that machine later on. I’ll still end up in jail if I buy it without a decision from the WC ... [So] I have to explain to the workers and they have to make the decision. And they can ask questions. First of all they have no idea what the machine is. Secondly, they don’t have the parameters that I have at my disposal. Ok if they ask for them I’ll give them, and I explain in general terms what it is. But in general terms they have to just trust me, they cannot verify it themselves. So they either trust me or not. If they don’t trust me they’ll say we’re not making a decision and then there will be no development of the enterprise. But usually the managers made their own decision, I never forced them to vote on anything but always sat down with them and we’d sit as long as necessary until they gave their approval.”

Trade unions, or syndicates as they are locally called, whose usual task would be to offset this kind of immobilization were of little help. Their role in Yugoslavia was mostly educational and confined to that of an advisory body (Jeffries 1993: 369). A retired union representative described to me the position of the union at the time as limited to precisely this role:

“We used to hold regular seminars during which they informed the workers of any changes in the labour laws which occurred quite frequently. This was all designed to keep workers updated on the latest changes in their rights and privileges. We also used to do ideological seminars during which they discussed the pillars of Marxism and tried to educate workers about their role in society. But the managers were mostly sucking up to the local authorities and it was they who had the last word on everything not the unions. A lot of the workers were also uneducated and semiliterate and they did not have the capacity to participate in the management of the factory or in the decision-making process. They would arrive at the meetings tired and wanted to go home and tend their orchards and so on.”

Party policies were commonly enforced by local political organs by influencing appointments to managerial positions (Woodward 1995: 334). This was a useful tool in a country where enterprises operated as one of the key mediums through which the social objectives of governments would get transmitted onto local communes (Uvalić 1992: 59; Kavcic 1990: 836). As a result enterprise representatives in local, republican or federal bodies were almost always drawn from the ranks of management and the party organization (Woodward 1995: 167) and the skilled/non-skilled hierarchy became firmly entrenched across all institutions.

Children from peasant and blue collar families for example formed less than fifteen percent of pupils in academic secondary schools, but represented between 70 and 80

percent of pupils in secondary vocational schools, learning a hands-on trade (Vušković 1976: 39). Few of those would proceed to university education or come to occupy positions of political influence. In fact, as educational capital became more closely associated with such positions, the period from 1958 to 1970 was marked by a continuous decline in working class representatives in the Federal Assembly and assemblies of the individual republics from eight percent of all delegates in 1958 to one percent in 1970 (ibid: 40).

The dominance of the techno-managerial elite is perhaps best reflected in the wage gap between skilled and unskilled labour particularly after a federal decision in 1962 to allow bodies of management to determine the structure of basic salaries and bonuses without consulting local trade unions or industry scales (Singleton & Topham 1963: 11). The decision was ideologically squared as part of the attack on Stalinist “etatism” and the Soviet practice of *uravnilovka* or “levelling” (Zukin 1975: 69). This kind of state imposed egalitarianism was seen as a fallacious and degenerate form of socialism that reduces everyone to shades of mediocrity and that a true “developed communism” should “show greater concern for the individual and his needs” (ibid). The effect was an explosion of income differences and by 1971 studies were indicating severe inequalities in the distribution of perquisites and benefits between educated/qualified and non-educated labourers (Vušković 1976: 36-7).

In spite of the official rhetoric praising the worth of production workers, the general tendency from as early as the fifties was to encourage the view that skilled labour inherently contributed more to production. This already shown in the first round of free decisions by workers councils in 1952 when workers refused to protest against the firing of unskilled workers seen to contribute less to productivity and approved schemes that gave significant raises to technical and administrative staff (Woodward 1995: 175). This

resulted in the popular (and certainly reinforced in practice) perception that the route to upward mobility led through education and a continuous improvement in one's qualifications (ibid: 317).

The possibility of such outcomes was paved by the Yugoslav leadership's authority building strategies in the post-war period. Initially Kardelj and Kidrich's model imagined the state as a body of rule-making experts needing no authority "other than that afforded by expertise and professional competence" (Woodward 1995: 317).

Sourcing legitimacy from the latter alone proved difficult and after 1950 the leadership began to draw more heavily on pre-war symbols of social status afforded by visible perquisites. By pairing formal criteria of expertise with higher salaries and better housing they hoped to impute greater authority to skilled professionals in charge of running the state and the economy (ibid)².

In many ways the system resembled the labour-management cooperation schemes that began to emerge in the first world in the eighties as an alternative to the Fordist top down separation of mental from physical work, only to reveal themselves as a new form of de-bureaucratized control that undermines the shop floor power of unions and the independent representation of workers (Kasimir 1996: 3). But a number of important distinctions need to be made here. Labour-management cooperation schemes in the US and Japan were accompanied by the implementation of just-in-time irregular production cycles that tailored production to incoming orders and reduced the amount of capital

² The socialist government was far from indifferent to this development. In fact it emerged as one of the key issues during the 10th Congress of the League of Communists in 1974, at which an agreement was reached that the education system was in dire need of reform. Of particular concern was the hierarchical division of manual and intellectual labour and the reproduction of social inequalities between the labouring and intellectual classes (Bacevic 2014). The reforms that followed were aimed mainly at raising the prestige of vocational schools and reducing the number of gymnasiums that prepare young people exclusively for university studies. The program never worked for various reasons, though mostly due to the inability of the productive sector to absorb the emerging workforce during the crisis years of the early eighties (ibid).

tied up in stock (ibid: 6). This was made possible by the development of new technologies that reduced downtime but also by introducing more flexible labour patterns such as temporary contracts and irregular working hours split up into periods of intense overtime labour when orders were high followed by periods of idleness (ibid). Such a move required an organized weakening of shop floor union power and a shift to nonunionized female and immigrant labour (see Lamphere, Stepick & Grenier 1994). Much of this characterizes contemporary industrial relations in Macedonia but neither job insecurity nor irregular production cycles were defining features of the self-management system of industrial production.

Job security was virtually guaranteed and decisions made by management to dismiss workers could always be appealed in law courts and even overturned by the worker's council which was most often the case (Horvat 1975: 239; see also, Woodward 1995: 317). Managers also had little incentive to fire workers in times of low economic results due to the federal policy of socializing risk which meant that struggling firms could rely on "soft loans" from banks and the diversion of funds from more profitable firms in order to prevent bankruptcies and the social instability caused by redundancies (Uvalić 1992: 104). Yugoslavia's banking system was such that banks operated as a non-profit service, founded and controlled by enterprises that could include loss making firms among their members (Jeffries 1993: 371). The founders not only provided the banks' funds but also distributed among them all the profits regardless of individual capital shares (Friedmann 1966: 633-4). In spite of their low profitability the nature of the system allowed firms, often guided by the interests of the communes in which they were located, to impose pressures on banks for additional resources in hard times (Uvalić 1992: 62).

In spite of all flirting with market regulation, employment was never an issue that the socialist leadership could afford to delegate to “market forces” with their suspected tendency to generate precarious labourers backed up by an “industrial reserve army”. The stakes were raised even higher by the very nature of the system which granted political rights exclusively to producers and managers of socially owned capital. Uncontrolled unemployment would bring into question the entire ideology of democratic socialism and “governing through the workplace”. Indeed, Woodward’s (1995) central thesis is that it was precisely the inability of the communist leadership to manage unemployment and reconcile the contradictions of political and economic objectives that brought down the Yugoslav system (see also Ramet 2005: 57). The ideals of self-management and a participatory democracy through the workplace were shot through with systemic deficiencies to the extent that few took the official ideology of “governing from below” seriously. Yet, Yugoslav socialism maintained a genuine popular appeal well into the eighties by operating on another essential socialist promise: the good life, to which I now turn.

3.4 Consumption and Legitimacy

In her influential work on socialism, Verdery defines the latter as being governed by the rationality of redistribution. What this means is that unlike capitalism, socialist regimes are not concerned with the accumulation of profit or surplus value but with the accumulation of distributable resources (1996: 25). The aim was to exercise control by creating dependency on a paternalistic state authority that ‘gives’ out goods. Profit is here less important than the hierarchical relationship thus created between giver and recipient. To maintain its authority the state needs to not only control the goods being

produced but the tools and resources necessary for their production. It also needs to control the goods being distributed even *after* their distribution in order to prevent consumers from claiming ownership and redefining the relationship between subjects and objects in ways that did not suit centres of power (ibid: 26). For these reasons socialist regimes placed more emphasis on heavy industry rather than on consumer goods such as jeans or chocolates. This in turn created tensions between the source of legitimacy (distributing goods) and the source of power (accumulating and controlling goods). Verdery writes that as regimes were more inclined to favour power over legitimacy they sacrificed consumption at the altar of production only to engineer their own demise.

Socialist Yugoslavia however appears as a deviation from this model. The system most certainly did not rely on maintaining a state of deprivation and scarcity to accrue power. Throughout its duration the self-management system was a curious combination of a labour-management cooperation scheme backed up by the Fordist commitment to continuous production, an eight-hour working day and a genuine link between production and consumption (cf Kasmir 1996: 2). Since the early post war days, the Yugoslav leadership was ideologically and politically committed to ensuring that workers had both the time and resources to lead fulfilled social lives that relied on the idea of leisure and consumption as the material embodiment of the ‘good life’ afforded by socialism. It was precisely this promise of the good life under the guiding hand of a capable political and technocratic leadership that constituted the main pillar on which the authority and legitimacy of the system relied on, rather than ideals of political empowerment in and through the workplace (se Patterson 2011: 124). Older workers I interacted with rarely acknowledged their role in managing their firms and often joked about how political dissidents could routinely be made to “disappear”. This in no way

seemed to detract from the sense of nostalgia that many shared about the “good old days”. As Grigoriy, (a high school educated power cutter), and many others in the factory put it, “Back then you could afford a house, a car, a holiday an education for your kids and still have something left. Today you need two jobs just to make ends meet.”

There is much exaggeration in these descriptions, but, the language reveals a sense of nostalgia for a time of careless abundance that is no longer present. Such narratives certainly cast doubt on the notion that exercising power during socialism meant keeping a tight leash on consumer goods. Borneman for example writes about the different ways in which capitalism and communism arouse and manage desire: capitalism renders it specific and focalized and continually satisfies it with ever changing products, whereas socialism arouses it without focalizing it and keeps “it alive by deprivation” (1990: 17, in Verdery 1996: 28). Consumption and the promise of abundance are seen as equally present in both systems, but the assumption is that communism can never conceivably fulfil it without politically undermining itself. This distinction between the two systems appears rather curious from the vantage point of a present capitalist order riddled with a crisis of legitimacy in the face of widespread economic “austerity”. From Grigoriy’s point of view it is precisely with the onset of capitalism that consumer desire became deprived of objects to satisfy it. Against this stands the still widely shared view of Yugoslav socialism as the symbol of abundance. To be sure, there was much inequality among Yugoslavia’s citizens in terms of purchasing power but as Patterson writes “the new vision of consumer abundance was grounded firmly enough in Yugoslav social and economic realities to give it substantial legitimacy as a dominant cultural model for the country as a whole” (2011: xvii).

The culture of consumption was perhaps best seen in the figure of Tito as the epitome of socialist enjoyment. In parallel with the years of economic growth, Tito nurtured a public image that closely reflected and symbolized this side of self-management. His penchant for expensive whisky and fine cigars was regularly publicized. Images of the ageing ruler indulging in one of his numerous luxurious villas on the Adriatic became commonplace by the seventies. A machinist by trade and coming from a modest peasant background, Tito was the very embodiment of the Yugoslav socialist worker rising from poverty and living the good life. It was hardly the image of the “austere socialist” many would come to expect from a communist leader. But frugality was never the foundation upon which the Party wished to model the country’s socialist outlook. In a sense, Tito truly became the “Body Politic” of the political economy of Yugoslav consumerism (Kantorowicz 1957) and embodied the “health, fertility and prosperity” of the federation and the promise of abundance (cf Graeber 2011: 3). For example he was known to have regularly used a sun lamp to maintain his tanned complexion and in later years resorted to dying his hair and wore a “brilliantly white set of false teeth” (Bringa 2004: 152). Rather than sheer vanity, his defiance of natural processes of aging was more an effort to publically maintain the vitality of the “Body Politic” that both reflected and projected how life in the republic ought to be lived.

Zukin’s sociological research with working families in Belgrade in the 70’s shows that socialism tended to be defined in terms of higher living standards and self-management was perceived by workers as a “set of economic rights” rather than a political system of governing from below (1975: 77-78). When she asked a skilled machinist in Belgrade with rural origins to compare socialism with capitalism before the war she received the following account:

“You can't compare them nohow. Before the rich were only rich and today the conditions are different. Today you can, take me, for example. I can get credit to get on an airplane and fly to Korcula [an island in the Adriatic Sea]. And before the war it wasn't like that. If you were rich, if you had money, if you had land or factories, then you go, you get on a train, you have your limousine, whatever you want. But today it isn't like that. They take some pocket money, or nothing even, and off they go. Company credits, airplanes, buses, trains, credit for anyone who works. The workers in a big trading company, for example, they get credit for clothing. Three or four hundred dinars, just for clothing.” (ibid: 79).

Self-management and socialism are here clearly visible as economic benefits instead of politico-ideological goals. Other youths described the system as including the “right to vote, the right to a vacation, and profit, and trade, and all that” (ibid: 97). Whatever the theoretical innovations in the development of socialist democracy, the latter was commonly experienced to go hand in hand with the development of consumer society (ibid). One of my neighbours in Shtip for example described life during socialism in terms of an orderly cycle of production and consumption, enabled by the security of work in the town's SOE's:

“[My wife] used to work in Nova Trgovija [NT] which was the only retailer in eastern Macedonia for white goods, furniture, carpets, kitchenware and all sorts of other goods. They had it all. And then everyone knew, Crvena Zvezda [a local agricultural monopoly] gets paid on the 16th - 4000 workers. Astibo [garment factory] on the 18th - 3000 workers, Makedonka [textiles factory] on ... I think it was 22nd - 6000 workers, and a few of the other smaller factories too and they all would come down to Nova Trgovija to do their shopping. And on credits. We had arrangements between our companies. In my company for example I was doing the accounts. And people would buy stuff from NT and then pay it out from their salaries. They agree on the rates and then I approve it and I start transferring a third of his salary to NT every month. The maximum was 1 third.”

The political freedom to travel abroad that was initially granted in order to facilitate labour migration and loosen the pressures on the domestic labour market, also gave birth to the common practice of cross border shopping. Crossing the border with ease to Italy or Greece was not just a consumption activity but a ritual confirmation of the political freedoms and European middle class connectedness of Yugoslavs, compared to the insulated countries of the Soviet Block. Trips to other communist states such as Czechoslovakia or Bulgaria were opportunities to display the superior living standards of Yugoslav market socialism (Mikula 2010: 218). These demonstrations of relative affluence are nowadays often nostalgically associated with the “Yugoslav era of peace and plenty” (ibid: 211). Italy, was the most common destination for Yugoslavs of all republics where they could purchase goods that could not be found on Yugoslav markets. Yugoslav customers was becoming so reliable by the 60’s that shopkeepers in border towns like Trieste were learning enough Serbo-Croatian to “lubricate their business transactions” (Patterson 2011: 5). Mikula writes that initially, trips to Italy would often be accompanied with a feeling of inferiority and an awareness of being surrounded by better dressed Italians, symbolizing the economic superiority of the West (2010: 218). Yet, when Italy’s economic fortunes took a downturn in the seventies some reversals in this pattern were beginning to emerge. Richard West notes the smug triumphalism of Yugoslav shoppers that he encountered in his visits to Trieste in those years. Statements such as “We used to come here to buy better quality, now we come because it is cheaper” were becoming curiously common. An Italian shopkeeper complained to him that “Fifteen years ago I had a car and the Yugoslavs had nothing to eat. Now they have a car and I don’t have two. The fact is that they are advancing and we are going backwards” (West 1994: 278; cited in, Patterson 2011: 288). If these statements seem extreme, they were backed up by Yugoslavia’s soaring reputation in

international circles, including the World Bank, as a model of developmental success (Bockman 2011: 100-102). Ordinary Yugoslavs were, of course, well aware that their country was being increasingly mentioned as an economic success story, which only further bolstered the legitimacy of Yugoslav socialism (as well as *their* myth of linear development).

3.4.1 The Socialist on Holidays

Perhaps one of the most important forms of leisure and consumption was the annual holiday. Sending workers on vacation was a high priority in the country's socialist outlook. Authorities took great strides in ensuring that what was once the privilege of the few would become part of the common good (Yeoman 2010: 82). Interest in tourism however was something the authorities struggled to create and develop. The federal government introduced two weeks of annual paid leave as early as 1946 and the Labour Act of 1958 entitled all employees to 12-30 days of annual paid leave depending on age and years of service (Duda 2010: 36). By 1973 this was extended to 18-30 days for regular employees. What remained unchanged was the constitutional entitlement to paid leave which employers had to endorse and workers could not reject. The Yugoslav ideology of socialist development had appropriated the idea (already popularized in twentieth century Europe) that no one should spend their holidays at home. Although, in their specific case it was the task of socio-political institutions to guarantee not only that workers did go on vacation but to manage the way in which they did so. The two main pillars of the system were financial assistance in the form of price reductions and annual allowances, as well as specialized accommodation resorts such as holiday centres (*odmaralishte* – “resting place”).

Although the early fifties saw a period of reductions in benefits and privileges for workers on holidays the economic boom of the late fifties reaffirmed the need to develop domestic tourism as part and parcel of rising social standards (ibid: 38). The still renowned K-15 card was introduced in 1961 for workers in socially owned enterprises, and, it allowed holders who bought round trip tickets for their annual holiday, discounts of 50 percent for air fares, and 75 percent for any other kind of transport. The discounted sums were paid to the seller by the state with money allocated from a federal fund to which all workers contributed with 1.5 percent of their gross annual income.³ By 1965 Yugoslavia had nearly 73,000 beds in workers resorts around the country with 72 percent of them on the Adriatic coast in Croatia. The quality of many resorts remained poor throughout the sixties and workers often complained to their unions of feeling malnourished and suffering from lack of sleep after spending two weeks in the resorts (ibid: 59).

But the bigger challenge that local authorities met when organizing holidays for workers was the lack of interest. Promoting the need for vacation was left to a special branch of the trade union. Its task was to organize lectures and showcase the beauties of the country and promote the right of the revolutionary class to a well-earned rest from hard physical labour. In spite of such efforts the president of the worker's council of Varteks, a textile factory in north Croatia told a Croatian daily in an interview that "The majority of workers come from the village. Many simply don't feel the need to go away for the summer. For some of them seaside holidays are a 'luxury', something peculiar to 'gentlemen' rather than workers." (ibid: 53). Many workers preferred to spend their time off work on subsistence agriculture back in their villages and in the presence of

³ The card was discontinued in the mid-sixties as development plans shifted towards promoting foreign tourism to boost the country's hard currency reserves leaving only the annual allowance or *regres* and holiday resorts in place.

close kin. As early as 1949 workers from Croatia were unwilling to travel to other parts of the country such as Montenegro or Macedonia for vacation because it was “too far away” and preferred to stay in Croatia.

Faced with such difficulties the authorities intensified their campaigns and efforts to improve the quality of the resorts and diversify the leisure activities and cultural life in such a way that would “render them genuinely accessible to the working people of our country” (Duda 2010: 54). This was a matter of high ideological importance, not only in terms of living up to the socialist ideal of distributing the good life as a common good, but as a social project through which to bolster the unity of the different Yugoslav peoples and overcome the traumatic and still living memories of fratricide during the war (Yeoman 2010: 74). Sending Serbian workers to Croatian holiday resorts was meant to both demonstrate the rising standards of living for workers, but also, for different peoples of the nation to get to know one another.

Slavnić (2010: 65) suggests that the abstract socialist symbols of brotherhood and unity, self-management and socialism itself were given a face and a name in the visual representation of the Yugoslav worker on holidays. The iconic representation of the worker engaging in consumption symbolized the affluence of Yugoslav socialism and the economic health of the self-managing society. This was clearly expressed by the president of the Tourist Alliance of Croatia Marin Cetinich, during a conference in 1953 where he defined the aims of tourism along strict ideological lines. The purpose of tourism was not to be mere loafing but to foster solidarity and unity and learn about the country’s “cultural-historical monuments ... the achievements of the socialist homeland, its factories, its other new projects and its overall construction” (cited in Yeoman 2010: 76).

Domestic tourism was thus to be an educational experience and a matter of national priority. To this end the Program of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia stressed in 1958 that more care must be undertaken of “everyday needs and provisions, rest and leisure” (Duda 2010: 54). More journals, brochures, magazines and tourist videos were provided as workers were obliged to stay after work and attend exhibitions on leisure and learn about the benefits of tourism “in order to utilize their work achievements more successfully” (Turizam 1960, cited in Duda 2010: 54). Political structures were in effect producing not only a particular type of worker through the self-management system, but sought to materialize the benefits of the socialist economy in the figure of the socialist consumer. As the period covering the late fifties and sixties saw a wave of liberalization and prosperity unfold across the country, consumerism and commercialism became tools for promoting “national unity through prosperity” (Yeoman 2010: 97).

The results were telling as domestic tourism increased from 19.5 million overnights in 1960, to 25.9 million in 1970 and reaching its peak of 59.7 million in 1986 (Duda 2010). Workers were expected to pay for their holiday themselves, though with state allowances and discounts the average Croatian worker in 1963 had to spend no more than three days’ worth of wages on seven nights with full board at a holiday centre in the Adriatic. There were certainly marked regional differences between the “average” wage of Macedonia and Croatia, though the general sense one gets from workers narratives is that holidays were “affordable”. Tourist magazines in the seventies were ripe with statements of content workers who spoke of the joy of “doing nothing” for a couple of weeks (see Duda 2010: 61). “What more do I need than swimming and sleeping? At work I have to bend down and get up a thousand times a day ... The only recreation I need is sleep” (Workers’ Daily, cited in Duda 2010: 61).

My sixty year old neighbour in Shtip who fondly remembered these Yugoslav trips and referred to the good old days as *Yugovina*, a local neologism derived by combining Yugoslavia with *ubavina* meaning ‘beauty’ in Macedonian:

“Ooh Aleksandar you should’ve seen how we used to go on holidays when the cheque books came out. Even if you did not have a penny you could go to the Adriatic and pay everything with cheques that get realized much later. Some of them were never even cashed in, I mean we didn’t even keep track of all the cheques we used to sign. And usually the Croats were in no hurry to realize them because they have money in the summer season so they keep them and start cashing them in the winter. So you just sign cheques with no date and enjoy your holidays. What can I say, it was *Yugovina*.”

It was this same person who at the same time assured me that when it came to self-management: “There was nothing of the kind. Whatever they decided in the party had to be implemented in the firm. The workers’ councils never contradicted instructions from the party. We never had much of a say. If the manager was close to the party officials the [workers’] councils couldn’t do anything.” These observations about disempowerment at the workplace hardly ever spontaneously emerge in workers nostalgic narratives of Yugoslav socialism but were nonetheless unhesitatingly offered whenever I made inquiries. One worker in the factory summed it up well by saying that “If you stayed out of politics you didn’t have to worry about anything.” Staying out of politics here means simply avoiding open confrontation with the Communist Party. But the common knowledge that Yugoslav popular democracy was a sham hardly seemed to detract from the sense of nostalgia evoked by workers of almost all generations. This apparent contradiction evaporates once we realize that the main legacy of self-management was not political “empowerment” but a widely shared “moral economy” in which socialist workers had a right to a fair portion of the public product by virtue of

investing their labour in the creation of socially owned assets (i.e. the industrial commons).

But it is important to note that these claims to economic goods are not to be treated as constitutive of the possessive individual, i.e. of workers claiming ownership of the products of their labour. Workers did, and still do claim economic rights but only because such acts work to sustain the related self within the moral realm of "community life" based on an ongoing cycle of mutual obligations (Rio 2014: 77). The salient references to careless abundance and the cyclical process of consumption and production point to a kind of potlatch ritual practice wherein economic activity was being firmly "embedded" in the social relations of reciprocity and redistribution nurtured by (and nurturing) the overarching political system (Polanyi 2001: 49-50).

3.5 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have tried to outline the contours of what I have referred to as the "moral economy" of Yugoslav socialism and the historical making of the socialist working classes. The importance of the socialist project cannot be overemphasized considering that it coincided with the spread of industrialization itself. This was particularly so in the less developed Yugoslav Republics, such as Macedonia, where the very existence of industrial labour as a significant (even dominant) social element emerged through the framework of socialist modernization schemes. I have paid particular attention to the growth and development of the self-management economic model as the peculiar Yugoslav contribution to socialist economic experimentation. While it cannot be denied that self-management was to a great extent the offspring of geopolitical necessity, the debates and social struggles that emerged around the efforts

of Yugoslavs to implement a socialist democracy through the workplace, took on an independent form. The end result however was not a popular democracy from below, but a peculiar form of *social* inequality (or as Schierup puts it, a patronage “coalition of unequal partners”; 1992: 90) defined by shifting modalities of interdependence between labourers, technocrats and political classes, conjoined by a utopian project of socialist abundance. In spite of frequent flirtations with market models and emphases on profits and efficiency, the production of commodities never veered too far away from the commitment to better satisfy the socially defined “needs” of producers (Patterson 2011: 124).

The rise of a local consumer culture that accompanied this commitment was in fact one of the main pillars of legitimacy that sustained the political system. It led not only to an increased pursuit of economic goods, but also to an embedded economic model where producing things was visibly accompanied by the making of a complex web of mutual obligations between producers, employers and the state, often blurring the boundaries between them. As Woodward notes, investing one’s labour in socially owned firms did not just define one’s employment status, but “the identities, economic interests, social status, and political loyalty of Yugoslav citizens. One’s place of work was the centre of one’s social universe” (2003: 76). The repeated, cyclical use of credits was not seen as an ominous form of impersonal indebtedness, but as a form of ongoing gift exchange that, in a way, continuously recreated the embedded, relational self, within the larger social fabric of Yugoslav society (see also Graber 2011b: 124). This leads me to one final key aspect I wish to stress here, and one that will become more apparent as the thesis unfolds, which is that the interconnectedness mentioned above also accommodated a specific conception of personhood, in which “persons are not understood as monadic individuals, but as nodes in systems of relationships” (Ferguson

2013: 226), which more often than not, implied some form of dependence and hierarchy. Understanding this is crucial for the discussion that follows where I will examine the kinds of debates that emerged from the historical undoing of socialism, and the attempts to unravel the fabric of mutuality that grew up around self-management.

Chapter IV: Decline and Transformation

4.1 The Long Drop: Experiences in the Garment and Textile Industries

The development of Yugoslavia's consumer culture was powered by high rates of economic growth in the decades following the war. Real income per worker grew at a rate of 6.8 % between 1960-70 and private consumption in the period 1970-1977 had an average growth rate of over 6 % (Patterson 2011: 39). Concomitantly, the period from 1947 to 1985 marked an average annual growth in GDP of 5.2%, whereas industrial production grew at an average rate of 12%. Macedonia had a slightly above average growth rate in this period of 5.8% per year (Miljković 1986: 197) and much of it was owed to heavy government investments in the productive sector. In Shtip this resulted in the rise of the textiles and garment industries in the shape of Makedonka and Astibo that dominated the town's economy throughout the socialist period.

Both Makedonka and Astibo were mainly the result of federal policies to tackle the issue of female unemployment in the southern regions. To this aim federal funds were channelled mostly in labour intensive, low paid branches such as textiles, electronics and tobacco processing (Mežnarić 1985: 216). All of these industries relied heavily on female workers as such work was seen as particularly suitable for women because it corresponded with "similar work within the family and household" (ibid: 217). Credits for these investments were received by the republic from a federal budget consisting mostly of foreign loans intended to boost the export sector (ibid: 279).

Makedonka (literally meaning "Macedonian woman") began production in 1952 with 120 workers following the purchase of equipment from the UK. It quickly developed into one of the largest and technically modern textile factories in Yugoslavia, producing

yarn, fabrics and cloth for the domestic market. As production expanded a weaving plant was added in 1955, clothing manufacturing line in 1962 and a jeans factory in 1983. By the seventies it also included its own restaurant serving food to the workers, three discount stores, a library and a medical unit for emergencies. The enterprise also oversaw in the early seventies the construction of apartment buildings for its workers in nearby Shtip, which they could purchase through different types of credits, mainly from the firm itself. Funds had been allocated for the construction of holiday facilities for its workers, a hotel and a camp site, on Lake Dojran in southeast Macedonia⁴. By 1987 the total number of workers stood at roughly 6000. Inside the industrial complex one finds more than just a gritty textile factory. The various buildings that housed the different departments are designed to be separated by luscious lawns and greenery, speckled with fish ponds, fountains, roaming pheasants as well as art statues celebrating the men and women of socialism.

The fibres and cloth produced in Makedonka were used in the clothing production unit of Astibo, whose main business was the design, production and distribution of men's, women's and children's clothes. The number of workers in Astibo grew from 119 in 1962 to over 2000 in 1972, and was by this time the biggest producer of casual clothes in all of Yugoslavia, exporting half of its products to foreign buyers. The factory grounds were similarly arranged to improve the overall ambient and paid special attention to the needs of its largely female workforce by building a kindergarten on site and providing a healthcare unit offering gynaecological check-ups, treatment and advice on reproductive health (Bonfiglioli 2014: 11).

⁴ See "Macedonian clothes for Europe" study made by the Centre for Research and Policy Making, 2006

However, the years of prosperity and economic calm that defined the sixties and seventies respectively were followed by the economic gloom of the eighties, ripe with inflation, unemployment and a mounting foreign debt, experienced by ordinary Yugoslavs as a dramatic reversal of the established trend of rising living standards (Pedrotty 2010: 340). The policy of borrowing western capital in order to fund growth through exports turned out to be disastrous when western economies entered a recession after the oil price shocks of 1973-4 and 1979 and blocked Yugoslav products (Gowan 1999: 85). The price of oil in 1980 was 28 times higher than it had been in 1971, whereas Yugoslav oil consumption rates had more than doubled in the same period (Miljkovic 1986: 166). At the same time, Yugoslav export industries that had absorbed the vast majority of borrowed capital experienced declining export rates. The end result was a huge trade deficit and piling foreign debt problem (Patterson 2011: 46; Jeffries 1993: 374).

This facilitated the turn to IMF supported austerity policies according to which the Yugoslav advantage in exports was in low labour costs (Woodward 1995: 281). The Kraigher commission, headed by the federal president Sergej Kraigher, was set up in 1981 to draft a stabilization program acceptable to the IMF. The report was released in 1983 and even though it recommended retaining the basic structure of social ownership it firmly concluded that increased efficiency and sustained profit levels were to become the only guarantor for employment (Jeffries 1993: 367; Hudson 2003: 59). The guaranteed minimum wage was reduced by 1982 and two years later the revised income policy was signed by all republican governments. The government sought to increase exports and access to foreign currency as much as possible and reduce domestic consumption to a minimum along with all imports not critical for production (Woodward 1995b: 51). Food subsidies were ended and investment in social services

and public infrastructure all but ceased, resulting in an eighty percent increase in industrial action from 1982 to 1983 (Hudson 2003: 60). By 1984 overall consumption had dropped to levels of the pre-boom years of the late fifties (Miljkovic 1986: 133; Patterson 2011: 47). Shortages of basic goods and services became the new reality for a population that had only recently come to identify themselves as comfortable citizens of a prosperous modern country.

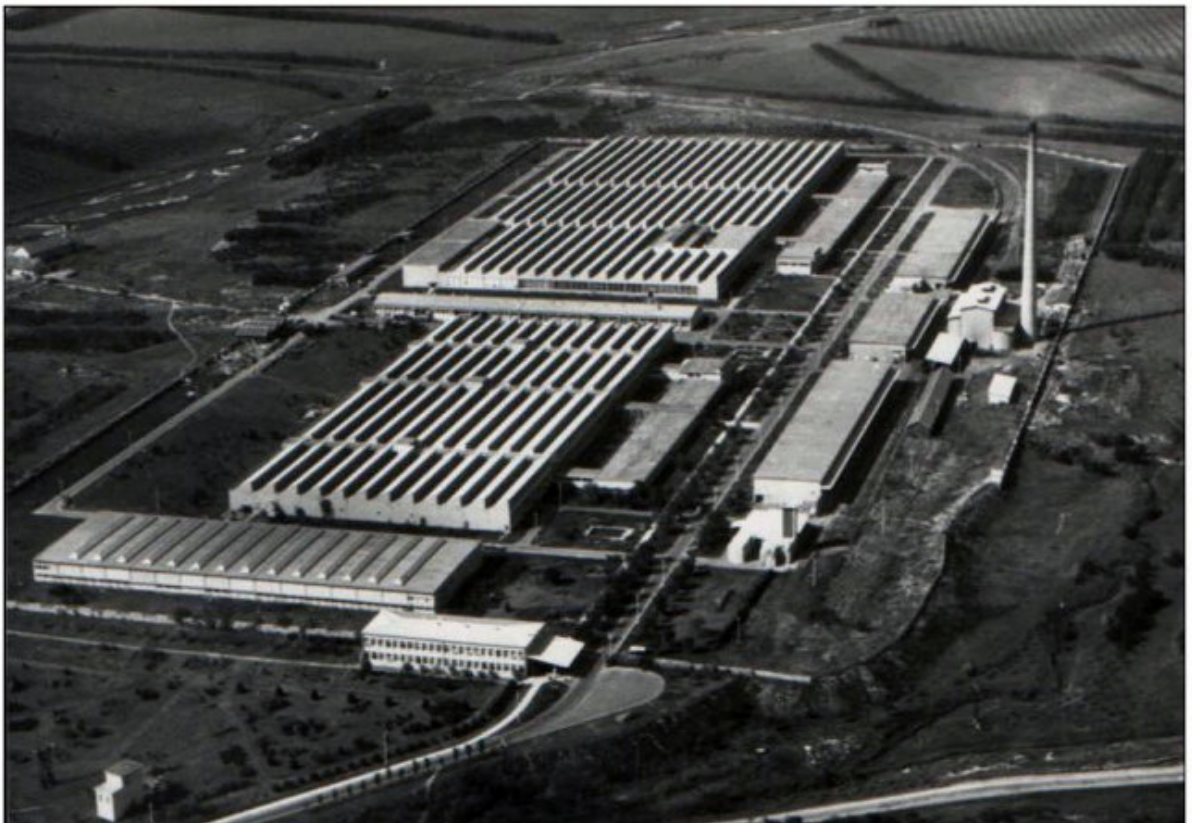


Fig. 4. Aerial View of Makedonia circa 1980

The vacation that once appeared to workers as another institutionalized hurdle were by this point an established part of consumer culture among workers. Already in 1984 the *Workers Daily* was publishing articles lamenting that vacations are becoming too expensive for the working population and that it was “hard for our people to give up the habit of and need for summer holidays” (Duda 2010: 56).

By this time Yugoslav firms had resorted to subcontracting and making their production facilities available to foreign firms who sought to utilize the local labour force at sub-minimal wage levels (Schierup 1994: 84). The garment industry became a particular target for such arrangements with foreign suppliers dictating and supervising production that was for the great part seasonally oriented (Schierup 1994: 85). By the end of the decade the average length of work in a Yugoslav garment factory rarely exceeded six months, subject to the demands of the market, with subcontractors receiving few or no orders when markets went bust. With an average pay of 3\$ a day, Yugoslav textile workers were by 1989 earning less than their Indonesian and South Korean counterparts, their main competitors on the market (Schierup 1994: 85).

Schierup (1994) argues that from the late seventies onwards, Yugoslavia entered a process of “re-peripheralisation” by retreating to a level of relative economic development vis-à-vis Western Europe that characterized the post-war period. As the economic decline slowly reached its apex in the late eighties, some sociologists began documenting the de-urbanization of the industrial working class and their retreat to traditional forms of peasant agriculture for their subsistence. The Croatian sociologist Vlado Puljiz expressed the irony with which “the individual peasant holding which the agrarian policy, during the whole post-war period, has endeavoured to beat down as a survival from past times, has today become the main cushion for the crisis, warding off social misery of huge dimensions” (in Schierup 1994: 83). The very things that were for so long dismissed as backward and disappearing now appeared most vital (Ferguson 1999: 250). Woodward adds that this was followed by resorting to older peasant norms of reciprocity and mutuality that supplemented the declining purchasing power of workers with “barter, gifts, friendships, political networks and connections and the reciprocal obligations of kinship and ritual kinship” which only increased “the

barriers to collective political action for change” (1995b: 56). In other words, economic decline was experienced not only in terms of diminishing material resources, but as a complete breakdown of the linear modernizing narrative of the socialist project. Much like Ferguson’s analysis of African industrialization, the achievements of “development” it appeared, were clearly reversible (1999: 13).

The consumer culture that the Yugoslav leadership had carefully employed to deflect criticism of both socialist rule and regional grievances could no longer be relied upon. The economic crisis directly fuelled regional discontent among the republics and nationalist leaders were quick to capitalize on the highly unpopular austerity measures that were beginning to be introduced by the federal government (Pedroty 2010: 340). The end of the Cold War signalled the loss of Yugoslavia’s international position as a link between the two blocs and Western support grew for separatist politicians in Slovenia and Croatia who were advocating that they should stop subsidizing the poorer republics’ ill planned economic projects (Ramet 2005: 56). Domestic economic liberals and nationalist leaders had been marked for support by Reagan’s policies ever since the early eighties in order to stimulate a “quiet revolution” to overthrow the Communist leadership with the use of economic instruments (Hudson 2003: 57). The demise of the Soviet Union only upped the stakes.

In 1989 the pro US Yugoslav prime minister Ante Markovic, led a series of attempts to salvage the economy by implementing an IMF sponsored economic shock therapy program that reduced available resources to individual republics and increased internal tensions (see Lampe 2000: 356). The following year however US congress cut off all aid, loans and credits to Yugoslavia, specifying that in order for aid to resume republics were to hold democratic elections under State Department supervision after which funds would be channelled only to those forces identified as “democratic” (ibid). A politically

and economically bankrupt Yugoslavia quickly slipped down the slope of war and disintegration that defined much of the decade of the nineties.

If the Soviet model was to favour power over legitimacy, the Yugoslav model emphasized legitimacy over power. When political structures did actually impose tight restrictions on consumer goods it was mostly under the pressure of “market force”, IMF reform programs and concerns about the profitability and efficiency of firms. But even then, the question of profitability was highly specific given the social ownership of the means of production. Firms were expected to operate at a profit and accumulate surplus value which could be then redistributed in order to secure higher standards of living for the general population. Creating and accumulating surplus value was never “an end in itself” (cf. Weber 1992: 34) but a means for promoting the ideals of political participation through production and fostering a middle class consumer culture among socialist workers.

This tension between the two poles of power and legitimacy defined internal debates within Yugoslavia for decades. Economic activity was periodically left to market regulation particularly during the sixties, only to force the state to start pulling levers whenever market behaviour exacerbated inequalities and failed to redistribute wealth in accordance with socialist morality (Estrin 1991: 189). This would spur liberal pragmatists into reiterating that interventions designed to redistribute only decrease overall profits and diminish the total available goods for redistribution (Lydall 1989: 76, cited in Jeffries 1993: 389; Woodward 1995b: 49).

When I interviewed Joncho, a former manager of Astibo’s engineering department, he explained to me the irresolvable contradiction in these priorities. He resigned from his position in Astibo after a prolonged strike by the workers in 1988. Faced with rising

inflation, the strikers demanded a no less than 50% increase in wages. which the management had deemed an impossible demand if the factory was to stay afloat. They nonetheless yielded to the pressure after an intervention from the local CP branch.

Joncho was incensed. In his words “*we were the experts*, the directors and it was our job to know what could or could not be done.” The ability of workers to wrestle this concession was seen as an illegitimate assault on the cultural (knowledge and expertise) and symbolic (capacity to define the terms of the debate) capital of the managerial elite.

As it turned out, the “experts” won the debate and by the end of the eighties the main obstacle to efficiency and profitability was firmly identified in the tendency of workers to scale up wages at the expense of reinvestment through the self-management system. The emerging consensus resulted the new Law of Enterprises in 1989 which virtually abolished self-management and social ownership and gave managers full rights to hire and fire in accordance with strict market dictates (Woodward 1995: 281). Enterprises were to be managed by private owners and creditors. The new Banking Law dismantled the country’s socially owned banks which froze all credits to the industrial sector. Huge numbers of industrial enterprises that had been struggling for over a decade were now being driven into outright bankruptcy (Hudson 2003: 60). Reflecting on these hard times, Joncho shared his thoughts on what he saw as a logical and inevitable outcome of an historical flaw:

“To be honest what happened to us would have happened anyway sooner or later. The inflation, the depression and so on ... Let me explain something. The *mentality* of today’s workers, of workers back then and workers in the Soviet Union is completely different. Those same workers during Tito thought that they were the vanguard, that the working class was the motor, you know this was in a way taken out of Capital and from Marxism as their currency. And they thought the working class was the vanguard of the country.

Now firstly, the very word “vanguard” cannot mean the majority, it can never be the mass of people. You cannot have ninety percent of the society being the “vanguard”. Even ten percent is too much for a “vanguard”. A “vanguard” is something that is absolutely unique with views different from its environment, and it is not accepted by the masses. That is why Galileo was persecuted. Because he was that vanguard. You can’t have everyone being the vanguard. The rest can only be a rabble.”

Even though this narrative was captured in 2013, long after the collapse of socialism, Joncho still insists that it had been more than clear to him during socialist times that something was terribly wrong with the ideology of self-management. His views were hardly an isolated occurrence. By 1990 it became possible and commonplace for Yugoslav intellectuals to define the economic decline as “the problem of economic efficiency of self-management system in general” (Kavcic 1990: 834) and that enterprise success depended mainly on the “role of top managers” whose main complaints were “that they do not have enough power” (ibid: 848). The decisive shift to market principles in 1988 only increased the unease with which the liberal technocratic elite experienced the formal submission of their authority as experts to the worker’s councils and the local commune. Although considerable, the political power of the technocratic elite was never completely removed from their legally defined obligation as managers to always “take into account the broader social interests of the working organization” (ibid: 837), an obligation that much of the technocratic elite found to be in contradiction with their primary task of running an efficient enterprise (ibid). Once the rules of the game began to break open many would eagerly participate in the unmaking of the historical and economical “aberration” that became the socialist state and the self-managing worker.

4.2 In-dependence and Privatisation: Setting the Framework

Macedonia declared its full independence from the Yugoslav Federation in September of 1991 and immediately embarked on the road to economic and political liberalization under Western supervision. The circumstances under which this transformation began to unfold could hardly be called auspicious. War in Bosnia and Croatia, and Macedonian participation in international sanctions on Serbia and Montenegro, cut off traditional export markets. Hyperinflation of the local currency reached 1664 per cent in 1992. Inflation was brought down after introducing an IMF stabilization package in 1993 in combination with price controls and a wage freeze in April of that year. Control of wages was extended until 1996. A World Bank and IMF reform programme was laid out in 1994 the purpose of which was to start large scale privatization, reduce inflation and reform the banking sector (Jeffries 1993: 346).

From a purely administrative point of view privatization in Macedonia developed at a faster pace than many neighbouring countries, but the larger political and ideological overhaul of Macedonian society that came with privatization is still a matter of intense public debate with unresolved questions. The initial problem the state faced was one of ownership. The inherited legal category “socially owned” implied difficulties that were not present in other Eastern Bloc countries where capital was unambiguously state owned. The prospect of nationalizing the economy in order to privatize it appeared too unpalatable for a government struggling to transform a socialist economy under IMF and World Bank tutelage. Instead, a complex legal document was drafted that became the “Law on Transformation of Enterprises With Social Capital”⁵. It laid out the framework by which all such enterprises were subjected to a re-registration in the courts

⁵ See: “Закон за Трансформација на Претпријатијата со Општествен Капитал” [Law for the Transformation of Socially Owned Enterprises], Republic of Macedonia, Official Bulletin 38/93, 21.06.1993

and by legal fiat were transformed into joint stock or limited liability companies. The document itself was largely based on the incomplete Yugoslav privatization program of 1989, developed under the guidance of Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs who acted as an advisor to the Yugoslav government. Sachs was also the chief creator of the Shock Therapy program for transforming East European states into fully operational market economies in order to achieve, in Sachs' words: "a recovery of human freedom and a democratically based rise in living standards" (cited in, Gowan 1995: 5).

A new government Agency was formed to control and oversee the organization of the transformation, offer legal assistance and provide the government with reports and estimates regarding the size, number and value of SOEs. In the process of registration SOEs (whose decision making bodies remained the worker's councils and the managerial board) were obliged to choose from one of the approved methods of privatization and transfer their assets to the Agency to act as a trustee (of the still socially owned capital) and facilitate the finding of interested buyers. The "transformation" thus became a half-way form of nationalization in which the "trusteeship" of socially owned capital was moved from workers to the state. All profits however from the sale of socially owned capital were appropriated by the state with the aim of supporting development projects and reducing the national debt.

The sale or privatization of capital varied according to the size of enterprises. Small (below 50 employees) and medium (below 250 employees) enterprises were free to choose between any of the methods prescribed by the Law. This included employee and management buyouts or a direct agreement with an interested external buyer. Large (over 250 employees) enterprises had to choose their method in consultation with the Agency. In order to facilitate the process many large enterprises were split up into their respective BOALs and became medium sized before being offered for sale. The shares

were offered first to existing employees as privileged buyers and after three months to any willing investors whether foreign or domestic. A majority of 51 percent of total shares was necessary to claim ownership, with the Agency continuing to claim dividends from any shares remaining in its possession. Employee buyouts became the dominant model for small enterprises whereas management buyout prevailed in the case of medium and large enterprises (see Drakulevski 1999: 32). Article 55 of the Law defined management buyout as “the sale of the enterprise to people who will take over the management of the enterprise”. As former employees this meant that the existing management boards would enjoy preferential treatment and could take over the enterprise by presenting a development strategy and purchasing 20 percent of the capital with an obligation to purchase a minimum of 51 percent majority shares within a period of five years (Shuklev 1996: 12).

4.3 (De)valuing the Industrial Commons

The value of an enterprise was defined in the law as the book value of assets minus liabilities (Article 7). Although seemingly a straightforward affair, assessing the value of enterprises was likely to produce odd figures for several reasons. Determining the real market value of assets in conditions where markets were not yet fully operational meant more politics and less accounting. The accounting system of the Republic itself diverged considerably from international standards and did not include standards on accounting for such things as state guarantees, government aid or financial information from affiliates (Shuklev 1996: 15). In addition, many books showed assets in former Yugoslav republics in the form of credits or property that were virtually impossible to recover due to war and bankruptcies of former trading partners. Further ambiguities

arose from the self-management accounting system under which wages were not considered a cost of production and were already in 1955 redefined as income (Woodward 1995: 176).

Then came the question of efficiency. Once again, determining how capable enterprises were to generate profits under market conditions was difficult, considering that self-managing enterprises were not designed to compete on the market or to generate profits as an end in itself. Their chief aim was to sustain Yugoslavia's consumer culture and guarantee political rights through employment for which they depended on a wider network of support and risk socialization involving protected markets, "soft loans" from banks and other enterprises and links to political structures. How well individual enterprises would perform once severed from this system was anyone's guess.

To address the particularities of poor performers when drafting the Law, it was decided that enterprises operating at a loss could also be transformed if they could show they had either found a way to cover their losses, or simply by reducing the overall value of socially owned assets with the consent of the Agency (Article 5). This placed managers in a uniquely advantageous position to assume ownership of enterprises through controlled bankruptcies (cf Verdery 1996: 211). Given the high dependency of enterprises on the above mentioned support networks, it took very little effort to bankrupt a company and decrease the value of its assets before applying for a buyout. A two year legal vacuum from 1994 to 1996, during which political parties struggled to form a stable government, allowed management teams to stop all restructuring activities that might increase the value of their enterprises and undermine their chances of buying them out (Slaveski 1997: 34). All this was a major concession to the former socialist managerial elite who were now in a perfect position to translate their vast social and cultural capital (links to influential persons, knowledge and expertise) into economic

capital as well. Faced with domestic political instability, war in neighbouring ex-Yugoslavia, Greek sanctions and domestic interethnic tensions, the state had little choice but to sell at whatever price, as well as resort to some “creative” solutions to facilitate the sale of SOE’s.

In order to increase the available capital in circulation the state allowed the use of frozen hard currency savings for the purchase of enterprise assets. Namely, due to severe inflationary fluctuations of the Yugoslav Dinar during the last years of the federation a great number of savers opted to keep their bank savings in more stable foreign currencies, usually Deutschemarks. Pressed for hard currency reserves, the Yugoslav state encouraged foreign currency deposits by offering high annual interests rates on hard currency savings of up to 10 percent. With the demise of Yugoslavia and the withdrawal of the Dinar, the Macedonian government found itself ill prepared for the introduction of the new currency, the Denar, which took much longer to implement than expected. To avoid running out of hard currency, the government continued the imposition of capital controls and restricted access to hard currency savings. For savers this meant that around half a billion Euros worth of foreign hard currency savings continued to be little more than irretrievable numbers in bank accounts.

The new state appropriated this amount as a public debt by issuing hard currency bonds to bank clients with a maturity of 15 years and an annual interest rate of 1.5% (Dnevnik 1997). Citizens however were allowed to use their bonds prior to maturation at their full face value to pay VAT on real estate, pay customs (merchants only), or for the purchase of shares from socially owned assets sold by the state. In the meantime however, through informal public initiatives, it became possible to trade these “frozen deposits” as they became known, for cash in hand at a discount that hovered around 58 percent (see Brown 2003: 30). Given the dire economic situation and the lack of requisite

information among workers to place informed bids on SOE assets, many newly impoverished savers who could not afford to wait for bonds to mature opted to sell their savings at extremely unfavourable rates to obtain cash in hand. Managers who did possess valuable insider information could thus buy up these “frozen savings” and receive a further 58 percent discount when using them to buy enterprise assets.

When the representative of the Agency, Verica Hadjivasileva-Markovska, gave her report before parliament in May 1997 regarding the progress of the privatization scheme, the numbers were shocking but somewhat unsurprising. She reiterated that the agency lists drawn up in 1993 contained around 1200 enterprises headed for privatization with an estimated value of 2.3 billion Deutschmarks (around 1.2 billion Euros). By the time of her address the agency had overseen the transformation of exactly 1000 enterprises for which the state managed to receive a meagre 167 million Deutschmarks, out of which 101 million came from “frozen deposits”, 45 million from bonds, and only 21 million came as cash payments. Accusations that the industrial commons were being given away for free that were already spreading like wildfire appeared vindicated by the numbers. Although highly controversial, the arrangement seemed politically less problematic as long as managers could keep enterprises running, employ workers and generate tax revenue. Such expectations however turned out to be baseless. The traditional eastern and Yugoslav markets were no longer existent and technological underdevelopment and political instability made Western markets all but inaccessible for local industry. The prevailing credit crunch and the complete absence of domestic financial markets made borrowing for investment well-nigh impossible, forcing all restructuring efforts to focus almost entirely on reducing labour costs (cf Gowan 1995: 14).

One by one, hundreds of enterprises lined up for liquidation or bankruptcy with their existing owners trying to minimize losses by laying off workers and making a last ditch effort to peddle any movable or immovable assets from the enterprise. The number of employees in industry dropped from 470,000 in 1990, a year before Macedonia seceded from the Yugoslav Federation, to 221,000 in 2000 (Majhoshev 2005: 64).

Unemployment in 1999 stood at a whopping 47 percent. An ESI (European Stability Initiative) study from 2002 centred on the town of Kičevo stated that ‘as in the rest of Macedonia ... economic transition in Kičevo has amounted to a painful process of *de-industrialisation*. A quarter of its socialist era enterprises are already in liquidation, and half of the industrial jobs have gone’ (8; my emphasis). For yesterday’s self-managing vanguard of society such scenes were unfathomable. Several decades worth of labour and investment in what were the centres of their social universe, were now disappearing overnight or melting into the pockets of a select few, leaving scores of destitute workers behind. The privatization process became commonly referred to as a “robbery of the national wealth” and in many ways can be summed up as a financially localized version of a state sanctioned capitalist “accumulation by dispossession” of the industrial *commons* (see Harvey 2004: 75). A former textile worker from Makedonka described to me the experience of this process with the following account:

“The bigger BOALS were the first to be sold and for nothing, they were virtually given away for free. And inside there were goods that were worth, and I don't want to exaggerate, maybe 25 or 50 times more than what they sold it for. And then they [the new owners] started selling the machines, the spare parts and so on. And they not only got their money back but doubled their profits. There were machines that were still in their wrapping there ... Wagons of iron and metal were shipped out. Colleagues of mine were going there as hired labour to do the cutting and dismantling. They were cutting them up and crying for having to destroy good machines. And no one can tell me that they could

not start something to feed at least a few families in there. All those years it worked and the town lived from it and now all of a sudden its scrap metal!?”

The final question is one often posed by those who lived through the privatization of their enterprises. Consistent with heritage of Yugoslav socialism, when speaking about the closing of factories workers do not mourn the loss of political rights to govern in and through the factory. The language instead is focused on the loss of economic rights to a portion of the social product and the ritual cycle of production and consumption that constituted the communal life of the related self. Thus the role of factories is to *sustain people* which means more than just securing certain standards of living and levels of consumption. It also means firmly locating economic activity as a socially embedded practice performed by moral subjects with mutual obligations.

In contrast, these daily scenes of privatization seemed more like a ritual transformation of “subjects into objects, owners into property and profit into debt” (Dunn 2004: 32). Instead of transforming wasteful socialist enterprises into technologically modern and efficient capitalist ones, the process generated a popular perception that privatization meant the transformation of perfectly operational SOE’s into worthless junk. But for workers there was much more to SOE’s than places of employment. They were the sites where social status and identity were realized and performed and their undoing threatened the foundations of both. This symbolic crisis was objectified in the actual physical deterioration of SOE’s. The machines, albeit now useless, continued to operate in a sense as symbols of changing social relations and power struggles in which workers ended up as the losers (cf Narotzky 1997: 111). In the act of cutting, workers found themselves embodying an altogether different economic subject position as owners of nothing more than their labour power that few were now even willing to purchase. In other words, workers became a kind of labouring surplus, severed from the webs of

mutuality and interdependence that held the previous system together. Given the importance of these webs for the integrity of the moral self, it should come as no surprise that the economic transformation brought upon the unsuspecting a profound crisis of personhood (see Ferguson 2013: 230).

4.4 Suturing the Market Ideology

Such developments brought new challenges to the economic orthodoxy that had been steadily gaining ground since 1989 that “advocates the myth of a natural order emerging in full glory –including stability, prosperity and welfare- as soon as the shackles of public ownership and state regulation are removed” (Brabant 1992: 94). A World Bank analysis of “The First Ten Years of the Transition” could only confirm the obvious fact that “concentrated ownership alone is not enough for effective governance” (Pradeep 2002: 72). This was clearly visible in the debates that took place during the special parliamentary session on privatization in May 1997 following the presentation of the Agency’s report. Opposition MP Ace Kocovski accused the government that privatization did not seem to increase efficiency and that “those enterprises that worked well in the past were bought by managers who ran them, thus replacing management with ownership ... and so continued to work efficiently in the new conditions, in other words efficiency was not achieved through privatization”⁶. He further added that the state had made a lousy bargain by making a deal with insiders and selling enterprises cheaply in order to keep workers employed, only to end up with little revenue from sales as well as hundreds of thousands of people on welfare.

⁶ Stenographic notes from the first Continuation of the 68th session of the parliament of the Republic of Macedonia, held on the 27th of May 1997. Accessed from: <http://www.sobranie.mk/WBStorage/Files/68sednica1prod27maj97.pdf>

Taki Fiti, the minister of finance from the reformed Communist Party of Macedonia, and now renamed Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDUM), defended the numbers by arguing that the low revenue was a result of the poor productivity of enterprises. “The only thing that determines the value of enterprises is their capacity to generate profit ... we have this understanding that an enterprise is worth a lot because it has magnificent halls and warehouses and this is absurd.”⁷ Testifying to the power of the neoliberal idea at the time among former communists, Fiti brought up in his defence Margaret Thatcher as an example of someone who “was also sharply criticized for selling state assets at a very low price, which many later realized was untrue.” The main problem, Fiti reiterated, was to be found in the “financial dubiousness, management issues, and problematic organization of production in SOEs”. In concluding Fiti told MPs that it is too soon to judge because “privatization on its own is not a panacea” and that “the real effects of privatization in Great Britain came fifteen years later.”

Reflecting parliamentary debates in Macedonia, in 1997 the OECD published a series of papers by transition economists analyzing the progress of Eastern European states where it was possible to argue that:

“It is somewhat misleading to describe the problem with East European economies as primarily one of state ownership ... What the decades of communist misallocation produced, especially in areas with little preexisting industrial base, was a set of white elephants in the middle of nowhere, with whole cities and regions dependent on dysfunctionally huge industries with very low quality of capital stock and an organizational structure incapable of functioning in a *normal economic environment*” (Frydman & Rapaczynski 1997: 264; my emphasis).

⁷ Stenographic notes from the first Continuation of the 68th session of the parliament of the Republic of Macedonia, held on the 27th of May 1997. Accessed from: <http://www.sobranie.mk/WBStorage/Files/68sednica1prod27maj97.pdf>

Thus, in the following paragraph we are told that:

“The pain of transition is directly proportional to the amount of ‘creative destruction’ that market forces are apt to inflict on the former state sector. The greater the proportion of firms without any reason for their existence under the new conditions, the less privatisation can do to soften the hard landing in a competitive environment. Under any regime, the essentially non-reformable, value subtracting firms must be closed down if they are not to continue to drain the resources needed in other, more dynamic sectors of the economy” (ibid).

Socialism here no longer figures as the competing alternative to capitalism, but as a theatre of the absurd, an unmanageable and unmarketable illogical system whose elements could never possibly form a functioning whole no matter how they are rearranged. The lunacy of the system is elevated to such levels that one could blame it not only for making companies work poorly under socialism but also for the fact that they could not work *at all* under capitalism. If the havoc wreaked by market forces is seen as a “creative destruction”, socialist firms stand in opposition as “destructive creations” – a cancerous tissue invading other vital organs. The patient itself turned out to be the illness. Poland’s Lech Walesa’s famously summed it up with a liquid metaphor: “It is easy to turn an aquarium (capitalism) into fish soup (communism), but not so easy to turn fish soup back into an aquarium.” What else is one to do but toss it out the window and start anew?

That this logic had taken a strong foothold could be seen in an interview given in 2000 by Sam Vaknin, a staunch monetarist liberal. Vaknin, an Israeli physicist turned economist and stockbroker, made his first public appearance in Macedonia 1996 when the SDUM hired him as a consultant for setting up the Macedonian stock exchange (a somewhat dubious choice considering that he spent most of the previous year in prison

after an Israeli court had found him guilty on three counts of stock fraud.) In any case, it was during this period that Vaknin first met Nikola Gruevski, the current long-serving prime minister of Macedonia, and then a young economics graduate who was one of the first active traders on the local stock market. Vaknin became his close friend and economics mentor and in 1998 the two published a book together discussing the main challenges facing the Macedonian economy. That same year, the SDUM bore the brunt of total economic failure and unsurprisingly lost the general elections to the conservative IMRO-DPMNU (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity). In 1999 Gruevski was appointed finance minister in IMRO conservative government, and brought in Vaknin as a special economic advisor to the government. In February 2000, Vaknin was also appointed as a member of the government committee for reforming the country's wage system and labour legislation in order to increase flexibility and liberalize the labour market (see Vaknin 2002). In April of that year, the self-assured Vaknin was unambiguous in announcing to the public the policies the new government needed to undertake:

“Macedonia knows what it has to do and it has known what it has to do for the last ten years. What was lacking was not the knowledge - but the political will and a modicum of courage and leadership. Whatever one thinks about this government - it is confronting difficult issues head on. We have to fire people in loss-making factories. We have to reform the banking system by opening it up to foreign investment. We have to collect more taxes by any means necessary - many of these means disagreeable. We have to privatize by selling directly to investors, if there is no other choice. This is a very partial list. And we have to absorb the public's ire and wrath. It is part of the price we have to pay for finally doing what needed to have been done long ago.”

After being questioned on whether this would not bring about further collapse of the economy, Vaknin added in somewhat prophetic terms that:

We have to collapse first in order to grow later. This is what the previous governments refused to accept. *Decades of socialism left in their wake such devastation* that the only sensible thing to have done is to *erase everything* and to start anew. Instead, previous governments tried to patch things up, to insert a finger in the bursting dike. The next two years will be horrible. People will lose their jobs. Factories will be closed. The state administration will be cut. The tax burden will increase. It won't be easy. But, if everyone will lend a hand and understand that *we have no choice* - this too shall pass. A new dawn will rise. The *remaining* factories will be lean, mean and efficient. The *remaining* workers will be industrious and conscientious. The *remaining* businesses will pay taxes. The country will seem much more appealing: modern, streamlined, efficacious, functioning. One has to go on a severe diet to look good later (in Vaknin 2010: 104; my italics).

Unsurprisingly, the IMRO were punished at the next elections in 2002 by an electorate with little appreciation for having been put on a strict diet of utter destitution. Power went back to the Social Democrats, who once more did little to alter the course of the privatization. In a sense, Vaknin merely expressing in plain unadorned English what became a matter of political consensus by the end of the nineties, which was basically that the specific goal of the transition was no longer to transform existing unprofitable enterprises into profitable ones. "Privatization" gradually developed into a more general project of social engineering aimed at introducing order where there had previously been none. What needed remaking were not just factories, but the entire state and the economic subjects that populate it. But there is another important element we must highlight in this narrative, that being the openly selective nature of this process. The brave new world of streamlined efficiency is only for those still "remaining" after doing what must be done. The "rest" are an unnamed and unrecognized abject-surplus. In other words, economic transformation and development is no longer concerned with

broader issues of social and economic inequalities but is designed to “enhance, quite specific, selected targets to optimize their comparative advantage” (Smith 2011: 6).

For Vaknin, it is literally the quest for modernity itself that is at stake, in opposition to the irrational devastation left by socialism. Perhaps the greatest irony of this argument is found in its capacity to ignore the fundamentally *modernizing* mission of the socialist project. However, for the communists, modernity was understood in terms of rapid industrialization and urbanization, and the reformation of the “ossified” peasantry into the socialist citizen-producers of tomorrow under the watchful guidance of an already enlightened elite. Thriftiness, efficiency and conscientiousness were not irrelevant to this project - they were core values to be achieved through the system of self-management. This was much in line with the Marxist critique of the bourgeois strategy separating private morality and public reason, or state from society which for the socialists led to the formation of a depoliticized and alienated proletariat (Turner 1993: 16).

In contrast, Vaknin’s promise of modernity and order is Parsonian in that it assumes that rationality is based on an economistic model of objective calculation and pursuit of material interest. It stands in opposition to morality which is seen as a feature of the non-rational and normative aspects of social life that lead to subjective and emotionally led concerns such as altruism (Levine 1991: 191). Parsons believed that the task of sociology is to study the latter whereas economists should busy themselves with the former (ibid). Embarking on the task, the economist Vaknin announces this separation:

- 1) in order to rebuild the economy, the country must carry out rational reforms and create a market driven model where the competition for scarce resources increases efficiency and productivity; and 2) in the process, the country must sideline and neutralize the petty moralizing that will inevitably emerge as a result of the suffering

that the reforms will unleash, by branding it a vestige of a non-rational socialist inability to separate the economic from the moral. Depriving socialism of any claim to reason ultimately deprived it a place in the new modern era of market rationality and further strengthened the argument for the “disembedding” of economic activity. Also, the sequestration of rationality by the economic paved the way for the new elite, supposedly in possession of authoritative and exclusive forms of knowledge, to step in as the new vanguard of progress.

But the self-assured claims of neoliberal modernizers that post-socialist economies would quickly catch up following the initial shocks of restructuring, have fallen far from those expectations. The economic trajectory of Macedonia post 1989 has been one of precipitous collapse followed by a feeble rebound to levels that are still below those existing in 1989. Yugoslavia's total share of world product in 1990 stood at .48, whereas in 2008 its combined successor states comprised no more than .06 (Böröcz 2012: 115), making Vaknin's modernizing narrative appear emphatically short-sighted insofar as it assumed a linear pathway and a predictable set of outcomes (Li 2009: 69). In addition, the early period of socialism was marked by significant improvements in economic performance and living standards which directly contradicts the neoliberal critique of socialism as an inherently unworkable economic system (ibid: 111). With hindsight, it becomes easier to approach this kind of economic rhetoric as precisely that: a discursive assault on socialist concepts powered by the economic jargon of Austrian school economics, supposedly demonstrating the logical impossibility of the very notion of a socialist economy (see Aligica & Evans 2009: 145).

4.5 Concluding Remarks

The redefinition of socialism as chaos was certainly an important rhetorical device for pursuing popular consensus for the imposition of neoliberalism as a new kind of “common sense way in which [people] interpret, live in, and understand the world” (Harvey 2005: 3). Rather than economic growth, the main achievement of this rhetoric has been to facilitate the withdrawal of the state through its ideological exposure to the forces of international economic operators (Gowan 1995: 9; Böröcz 2012: 121), and the introduction of new mechanisms for the realignment of “economic, social and personal conduct with [neoliberal] socio-political objectives” (Miller & Rose 1990: 2). But it is precisely this attempt to introduce an all-encompassing neoliberal rationality and erase former knowledge-practice systems that generated cleavages in the new ideology. The privatization process did not simply clear the ground for the unfettered ideological growth of capitalism but became the loci of a “complex negotiation of reality” (Ong 1988: 28).

For example this is evident in the failed attempts of privatizers to use “particular technical devices of writing, listing, numbering and [accounting]” that were supposed to turn SOEs into “knowable, calculable and administrable objects” (Miller & Rose 1990: 5). Instead, SOEs were found to be “fundamentally inauditable” (Dunn 2004: 40), both through the failed attempts to submit them to capitalist accounting procedures and in their classification (i.e. rejection) as economically unworkable “destructive creations”. The process of neoliberalization did not follow the Foucauldian metaphor of “stacking” a new discursive grid upon another and in the process making invisible previous forms of knowledge and practice. As will become apparent in the chapters to come, neoliberal planners found the legacy of self-management not only impossible to “(re)organize” but also difficult to erase. Socialist practices and subjects that could not be made to

disappear were instead reified and exhibited as artefacts of the *absurd*, such as factories that produce nothing of value or workers demanding their “fair” share of nothing.

In other words, the conceptual categories and practices of socialism simply became in Mary Douglas’ words “like matter out of place” (Douglas 1996 [1970]: 153), and a “contravention of order”, by which she means the “by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, insofar as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements” (Douglas 2001 [1966]: 36). Such elements involve complex socio-symbolic categories of personhood (such as the embedded “socialist worker”) and certain aspects of the “welfare state”. The categories that formed part of the moral economy of Yugoslav workers were re-classified as an impediment to the development of society and the individual. In Turner’s terms, we can interpret this kind of re-classification as a ritually orchestrated separation of socialist workers from their social position in the “moral economy” of Yugoslav socialism; and placing them into an ambiguous liminal space, from where they can be called upon to assume their new roles as conscientious and industrious entrepreneurs whose value is based on productivity and market demand. In effect, the privatisation process sought to unleash the possessive individual and establish the foundations of a competitive labour market. If it was labour who employed capital during socialism, privatization ensured that, yet again, capital will employ labour. But as already hinted, not everyone is “hailed”, as Althusser would say, by capital to realize their “marketable labour capacities” (Smith 2011: 16); nor do those who *are* hailed, necessarily respond to the terms of the calling. In the following chapter I will discuss the complications arising from this political process in terms of class and personhood. Particularly, I will look at the terms of interaction between the newly released labour force, the state and the former managerial elite.

Fig. 5. Makedonka today: scenes of decay





The old cotton mill. Plaque to the left dated 6-IV-1952 says: “The work collective received the management of the Cotton Mill”



Fig. 6. Selected Economic Indicators (taken from Jeffries 2002: 357)

Table 3.1 FYR Macedonia: selected economic indicators 1990–2000

<i>Economic indicator</i>	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000 (estimate)
Rate of growth of GDP (%)	-9.9	-7.0	-8.0	-9.1	-1.8	-1.2	1.2	1.4	2.9	2.7	5.1
Rate of growth of industrial output (%)	-10.6	-17.2	-16.0	-14.3	-9.7	-8.9	5.0	2.9	4.5	-2.5	
Rate of growth of agricultural output (%)	-10.2	17.6	0.4	-20.4	7.8	2.3	-2.9	0.0	3.9	0.3	
Inflation rate (consumer, %)	608.4	114.9	1,664.0	338.4	126.5	16.4	2.5	1.5	0.6	-1.3	9.2
Budget surplus or deficit (% of GDP) ^a		-3.6	-9.8	-13.4	-2.7	-1.0	-1.4	-0.4	-1.8	0.0	1.0
Unemployment rate (end of year, %) ^b	22.9	24.5	26.2	27.7	30.0	35.6	38.8	41.7	41.4	47.0	
Balance of payments (current account, \$billion)	-0.400	-0.262	-0.019	-0.015	-0.180	-0.222	-0.289	-0.277	-0.309	-0.135	-0.279
Foreign direct investment (net, \$million)			0.0	0.0	24.0	12.0	12.0	18.0	175.0	27.0	169.0
Population (million)			2.2	2.2	1.9	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0

Part III: Negotiating Change: Free Markets and Dependent Workers

Chapter V: Subsuming Labour

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I analysed the decline and transformation of Yugoslavia's and Macedonia's socialist economies and the separation of the labouring population from the webs of socialist dependence. Polanyi described a similar process in his analysis of forms of paternalism in pre-industrial Britain. In particular, he singled out the invention of the "right to live" with the enactment of the Speenhamland law in 1795, which guaranteed wage subsidies so that a minimum income could be assured for the poor irrespective of their earnings (2001: 82). The immediate aim of the law was to offer the minimum amount of social protection for impoverished fellow Christians, towards which there existed a moral obligation to provide assistance. But while Speenhamland "protected labour from the dangers of the market system" it directly undermined the capitalist economy by preventing the emergence of a free labour market, leading to a depression in wages and a rise in pauperism. As the scope of industrial market society enveloped the countryside, paternalism became identified with everything that was wrong in society and gave license to the imperative to liberalize and regulate through markets. Eliminating Speenhamland and the "right to live" turned into a prerequisite for the establishment of a free labour market without which a capitalist economy could not function (2001: 84). The immediate effects of reducing moral subjects to labour power were devastating for the poor and before long "it was not the absence but the presence of a competitive labour market that was the new source of danger" (ibid: 87).

A similar rationality was certainly made explicit by the ideologues of neoliberal transformation in Macedonia through the political and ideological assault on everything socialist and the promise of neoliberal modernity. But the great turn towards efficiency

and productivity has left many expectations unrealized. Twenty five years after the neoliberal onslaught, the large industrial reserve army that the state managed to place on the labour market remains to a large extent unabsorbed by capital. In the June 2013 IMF country report Macedonia's youth unemployment rate was ranked 4th in Europe at just over 50 percent but topped the charts in both the overall rate of unemployment (over 30 percent) as well as the long-term unemployment rate (IMFCR 2013: 4). These numbers have hardly changed in spite of an average real output growth rate of three percent a year between 2006 and 2012 (ibid: 3). This "lean mean" economy is not just experienced as an overall decline in living standards and working conditions, but as the disintegration of the moral community and of the integrity of the moral self. As argued, releasing workers from the socialist webs of dependence also meant the transformation of embedded subjects into discarded objects. Polanyi warned against the dehumanizing consequences of reducing individuals to nothing more than labour power with a market value, and he remained convinced in "society's" inbuilt capacity to protect itself. Moreover, he suggested that the only way a person thus robbed of the social status afforded by paternalism could "regain his soul" is by "his constituting himself the member of a new class" (2001: 103), the effects of which were not to be felt until the onset of trade-unionism in the 1870s. It was in the very abolishment of Speenhamland that Polanyi saw "the true birthday of the modern working class, whose immediate self-interest destined them to become the protectors of society against the intrinsic dangers of a machine civilization" (ibid: 105).

The twenty five year old history of market based reforms in Macedonia does not share Polanyi's optimism, and the prospects of a self-interested class movement emerging from the rubble of socialism appear to be diminishing rather than growing with the passage of time. Despite this, the analysis in the pages to follow will seek to show that

in the face of absent class based strategies, workers in Macedonia have still been able to mitigate the effects of marketization and commoditization and to “regain their soul” by challenging the kinds of inequalities that develop within a market based society. As argued already, the transition from socialism to neoliberalism was not a movement from dependence to autonomy but a movement from social inequality to asocial inequality. In other words, a shift from a relation of dependence wherein workers were recognized as moral subjects with the ability to make claims on their superiors, to a relation of dependence wherein they persist as commodities with a market determined exchange value.

It is this legacy of the socialist moral economy that resonates and is refracted within contemporary strategies through which workers seek to create forms of dependence and inequality that are firmly contextualized within the fleeting boundaries of some kind of moral community. Such strategies are almost by necessity non-class based given that they seek out forms of “thick” social recognition from the Other in a social context where the language of class is being increasingly deprived of currency. Social recognition also entails a whole gamut of factors ranging from gender, age, ethnicity, skill and education, all of which have their separate effects on the way different categories of workers relate to each other and with influential others. We are thus dealing with a heteroglossia of voices relying on multiple strategies. It is at this point that we also need to bring in language as the point of convergence between praxis and the imagination particularly when it comes to the task of constituting the moral self within the context of a larger imagined “whole”.

The two following two chapters will explore the themes laid out in this introduction and are to be read as one. I will try to isolate and analyse a number of separate categories of workers in order to illustrate both the process of creating a “free” labour market and the

emerging distinctions and points of contact within it. I will firstly look at the dissolution of unionized labour, the divisive politics of the state and the role of international financial operators. I will then proceed to examine two main sections of the new-old industrial workforce that correspond to two different kinds of abjection, using examples from the garment and textile industries in Shtip: firstly, the skilled and (mostly) female garment labourers that were highly sought after by the emerging capitalist elite. These are the workers who faced the prospects of commoditization and alienation in the workplace, and sought to negotiate their re-entry and position within the new exploitative relations in production. Secondly, there are the workers for whom the dispossession of the industrial commons was never attached to “any prospect of labour absorption” to begin with (Li 2009: 69), effectively reducing them to an unnecessary “surplus” in relation to the requirements of capital accumulation (ibid: 67). Smith (2011: 4) refers to this form of capitalism as “selective hegemony” and contrasts it with the “expansive hegemony” of the “Keynesian National Welfare State”. The focus on “selectivity” is useful here in highlighting the creation of surplus populations whose predicament is not to be found in their “interpellation” or subjection to the interests of capital, but in that they became not worth subjecting and were cast off by market society (Ferguson 2013: 231). I will not analyse these groups in isolation but in dialogue with the state and the new industrialists-employers. I will be drawing on data from personal interviews and communication with people in Shtip, as well as newspaper archives and other literature. By exploring the various strategies of dependence deployed by these different categories of people, I hope to shed some light on the social formations and politics of class and personhood under changing labour regimes.

5.2 The Brief Rise and Fall of Unionized Resistance

The period of the nineties was marked with an unprecedented number of strikes and protests and an upsurge in the activity of unions. The new economic and political realities demanded that unions reinvent themselves and abandon their traditional educational roles and take the fight to the streets to articulate the plight of workers. The various demands of workers in this period were mostly directed at the state and reflected the overall collapse of industry and the personal loss of any semblance of security and stability. Country wide union reports covering the period from 1996 to 2002 showed that, starting from the most frequent, there were 470 demands relating to higher wages, payment of unpaid wages, wage benefits etc; around 284 demands were made to replace existing management structures; 237 demands were made relating to unpaid contributions, pension insurance and health insurance; 115 demands were made to governments to ensure continuous production and better working conditions (granting credits for production, providing raw materials, heating, health and safety equipment etc.); 111 demands were made to revise the privatization schemes that transformed socially owned enterprises (Majhoshev 2005: 82-83). The most frequent demands from 1999 onwards focused on securing health and pension insurance and continuous production in factories with the aid of state credits (ibid: 160) and securing welfare support for workers from former socially owned enterprises with over 25 years of work experience until their next employment or retirement. Unsurprisingly, there were no demands to “return” SOE’s in the hands of workers and the overall focus was on maintaining state patronage and protection from the debilitating effects of marketization.

Being a core industrial hub, Shtip’s struggling workforce took much of the initiative and public limelight as the two garment and textile industry giants, Makedonka and Astibo,

felt the full sting of economic decline. The state struggled throughout the nineties with futile attempts to keep Makedonka alive by implementing various restructuring programs, partially laying off workers and granting loans for production. The efforts came to an end in the middle of 2001 when, after being pressured by the World Bank, the IMRO government of Ljubcho Georgievski announced its decision to liquidate the enterprise by December the 31st of that year. Around fifty workers arrived in front of the parliament building in Skopje and pitched tents in the park opposite the main entrance in a desperate attempt to make their plight visible to those in power. The protest gave no direct results and the timing itself was particularly inconvenient. In the summer of 2001 the country found itself facing yet another precipice when sporadic clashes with Albanian separatists in the Northwest began threatening to transform themselves into outright civil war. Economic issues briefly fell in the background as public attention was captured by negotiations with the rebels.

In January 2002 the government reiterated its decision to liquidate Makedonka along with a number of other enterprises and announced that by doing so they had met all the necessary conditions for receiving the second tranche of loans from the WB (Popovska 2002). This sparked further unrest among workers that culminated in April 2002 with a massive protest organized by the Macedonian Union of Syndicates that included workers from textiles, metal, mining and automobile industries as well as public administration workers. The number of protesters exceeded 50,000 people who voiced their indignation in front of the parliament and government buildings (Majhoshev 2005: 162). After Union delegates were prevented from entering the parliament the mass of workers tried to storm the building which led to violent clashes with the security forces during which ten workers and union delegates ended up with light injuries. No negotiations took place on that day. The following month unions organized a joint

country wide strike that again included between fifty to seventy thousand workers from industry and the public sector. Left wing intellectuals celebrated the event as a massive show of workers' solidarity displaying the revolutionary potential of the working classes (see Atevik and Weston 2002). The show of solidarity however turned out to be short lived. Whereas industrial workers were demanding the usual payments of wages and contributions in arrears, or loans to restart factories, public sector employees were mostly affected by a drop in real wages.

Up until 2001 both left and right wing governments had been justifying their policies of holding down public sector wages by referring to pressures from the IMF with which a number of stand-by loan agreements were made in the nineties. IMF policies traditionally conditioned all governments to support strict austerity measures such as wage freezes and labour deregulation. Funds were channelled towards supporting the country's balance of payments and agreements explicitly disallowed the use of credits to support budgetary obligations such public sector wages (Majhoshev 2012: 241; Stevkovska 2010). However, in 2001 the IMRO government decided not to renew its agreement with the IMF that year in order to uphold its decision to partially reimburse over 10,000 people who lost sixty million Euros in an ignominious pyramid scheme set up between 1992 and 1997 (Jeffries 2002: 347; Vest 2002). This decision provoked immediate criticism from the IMF representative in Macedonia (Sodikj and Petkovski 2002), but it allowed the government more liberties in their negotiations with the strikers. The result was a twenty percent increase in wages for public sector employees, thus appeasing the majority of the strikers and isolating them from industrial workers (see Majhoshev 2005: 162). Only ten years before, the distinction between industrial and public sector employees would have been much more difficult to make, as both categories could be treated as members of SOE's with similar sets of rights. Public

sector workers now occupied an altogether different and, to a great extent, privileged class position, secured not by their market value but by state decree (see Parry 2009: 183). Instead of unity, the strike only highlighted the different ways in which capital and the state interacted with the various subsections of labour.

Industrial Union delegates leading the strike failed even to get an audience with the government and the momentum was losing ground fast. Privatisation and everything that came with it appeared irreversible and irresistible. The following year saw the last street protests of workers though their numbers had dwindled to less than three thousand. Although the emerging private sector managed to absorb some of the newly released workforce, union surveys of its membership in over one hundred struggling ex-SOE's in ten municipalities, showed that around eighty two percent of those surveyed were of the opinion that open protest was no longer considered a viable strategy for pursuing their demands (Majhoshev 2005: 169). The unions themselves quickly began to disintegrate and lose legitimacy. By 2012 the Union of Syndicates of Macedonia had dropped to no more than forty two thousand members in the entire private sector (Majhoshev 2012: 143) and had shifted their strategy towards less antagonistic approaches such as the implementation of collective agreements and negotiations.

In Shtip, when I interviewed Andon Majhoshev, a former union official, he attributed the decimation of the union's membership to widespread disappointment stemming from "too much failure" and a feeling of "helplessness". He recounted one of his last attempts to build a union membership in one of Shtip's garment factories:

"We approached one factory to try and recruit workers and the owner told me that the factory is a bigger union than the union itself. He looked at me and he told me 'What are you going to do for them [the workers]? Are you going to give them higher wages? I am the one who gives them wages' he said. 'I am the one who will decide whether they

receive higher wages. I am the one who gives them medical insurance. I will pay for their hospital expenses if they get injured, we sell them products at discounted prices, pay their contributions. If they get into some money problems we can help them out. The company can give them a loan. What can you do for them?’ And I wasn’t really sure what to tell him. The problem was that the union really could not offer much to the workers under the current conditions. We were broke, we had no money, which is only natural because we did not have a membership. Without any active members the union really did not have much to offer the workers.”

To many contemporary activists and social rights movements, this shift marked the complete conceptual abandonment of collective “class” struggle and the total capitulation of labour to capital. But whilst this particular capitalist was being dismissive of unions, he was already making a different kind of concession: firstly, that wage levels are not determined by invisible “market-forces”, but by flesh and blood people; and secondly, that simple wage remuneration is not the only legitimate relation that can take place between himself and his employees. In the pages to follow I will explore how such concessions and relations are made, denied and negotiated, and extrapolate the wider political implications of this process.

5.3 “Liberating” Garment Labour

The brief account above shows that although “shock therapy” was met with considerable social unrest the dissolution of unionized labour was nonetheless carried out with relative success. All in all, the dismantling of unionized movements and the steep rise in unemployment, paint an irremediably grim picture of the political power of workers in the new economy. But this does not mean that workers have been unable to continue negotiating their socio-economic position by other means. Hardt and Negri

suggest that we should re-examine the common wisdom that low union representation and the lack of collective political organization lead to a weak and powerless working class (2000: 269). On the contrary, they see working class power to reside “not in representative institutions but in the antagonism and the autonomy of the workers themselves” (ibid). In other words, labouring populations are just as - if not more - likely to develop forms of creative autonomy outside the factory, by using strategies that rely, among other things, on the active refusal to work (ibid). In this section I will focus on this last point, but I depart from Hardt and Negri in that I do not treat this refusal as a longing for autonomy. On the contrary, I approach the refusal to work as the refusal for entering economic relations defined by “asocial inequality” and a longing for “social inequality”, which can wreak all sorts of headaches for the industrial elites. Let me turn to some examples.

When I interviewed Danica, one of the first businesswomen to open a private garment factory in Shtip she recalled the challenges she faced when searching for willing workers for her small production line in the early nineties. Danica had worked as a line manager in Astibo since the early seventies and quit Astibo in 1990 to work for a British company with production facilities in Macedonia. British investors had been particularly attracted by the declining value of the Yugoslav Dinar in those years which made purchasing labour and materials in Yugoslavia a very lucrative affair. The company was reluctant to continue working with Astibo directly as it was seen as lacking the necessary “flexibility” to adjust to the declining international value of labour. After approaching Danica, she had agreed to leave Astibo to work as a quality controller but also to assist in attracting skilled workers from Astibo into their production line. This second task however proved impossible at first.

“We needed only twenty workers but a hundred and twenty came for testing. By then the smaller firms were already going under and there was a lot of available labour, but I had only two women that wanted to cross over from Astibo. It was a great risk you know. People still saw security in the public firms. None of us thought that Yugoslavia would fall apart. No one thought that the time had come for a new system. I crossed over for financial reasons. Wages had gone down significantly in Astibo and the English offered me a salary 30 times what I was getting in Astibo. I thought that even if I lose this job after a year I will have earned 30 years’ worth of wages by then.”

In the end Danica had to personally train the new workers and supervise the small production unit they had set up in a small apartment. After some time they had moved to a larger space in Shtip’s industrial zone but the principals of recruitment remained the same. Sudden change came when in 1994 her British employers decided to pull out of now independent Macedonia as the new currency, the Denar, no longer offered a favourable exchange rate to the Pound. After some negotiations regarding the price of the company, Danica took out a loan and took ownership of the company herself.

“And we still had the same problems. Workers in Astibo had an allergy to private employers. Astibo was barely working but it was still standing. It wasn’t until 97 that they started to cross over.” By then the garment producing giant was fully defunct and had for some time not been able to pay out regular wages nor contributions to its workers. But even though some of the workforce was being released the process was still slow going. In April 2003 Astibo’s union declared that it still registered 1804 workers, which was a decrease of only 450 workers in the past 5 years (a good portion of which had been retirees). It seemed that the “self-regulating” labour market was long overdue for some assistance.

After more than a decade of decline and lack of investments that year the government decided to sell the factory at a public auction with a starting price of 2.5 million Euros. The initial winning bid made by an Italian company for 2.2 million was withdrawn after the owner inspected the grounds of the factory and concluded that the machines had been grossly overvalued. The second best offer came from Sasho Miladinov, a successful local businessman and garment factory owner. Touting his “excellent business relations with international partners”, Miladinov had offered 2.1 million and promised the townsfolk that soon, “most of Astibo’s workers will get back to their jobs” (Bojadziski 2003). The deal went to Miladinov. As legally stipulated, he deposited 10,000 Euros as a guarantee that he would transfer the full sum within 21 days.

Suspensions however were in the air that Miladinov was in cahoots with a consortium of local garment factory owners, led by Vlado Netkov, and trying to bring the price down even further. The group consisted mostly of Astibo’s former top management echelon who were already exposed to accusations of deliberately working to undervalue the factory during the nineties. Nonetheless, the consortium was the next bidder in line with an offer of 1.7 million and according to the privatization law, if for whatever reason the first ranked bidder pulled out of the deal, the procedure once started would have to continue with the second ranked bidder and so on. As it turned out, after 21 days Miladinov pulled out citing loss of interest among his international partners. Nada Cvetanovska, Astibo’s bankruptcy manager, expressed her disappointment with Miladinov who “up until a few days ago was assuring us that there has been no change in his intentions or in the intentions of his foreign partners” (Bojadziski 2003b; Dnevnik 2003). Speculation emerged again that another pull-out was to follow dragging the price down even further. However the terms of the auction were changed requiring the buyer

to deposit 30 percent of the full sum as a guarantee. Finally the factory was sold to the consortium and was split up into a number of private production lines.

Danica was one of the members of the consortium (as was the owner of Stichko where I did most of my fieldwork) and for her the sale of Astibo meant that at long last a large pool of skilled workers finally became available. “Then we moved into one of the plants and took 120 of former Astibo workers ... That wasn’t part of the deal but we told people that whoever wanted to work could stay. And then once they crossed over all the complaints began.” When I pressed for more information about the specific kinds of complaints Danica only offered a broad answer. In her view this had nothing to do with differences in work conditions.

“I claim that in Astibo we worked even more, and we worked overtime, but we are a *strange* people. In that time self-management taught us that we are working for ourselves, that the factory is ours ... but Astibo did not get transformed into a joint stock company where they all received shares instead it remained state owned [sic] and the state was selling it. And imagine me personally I worked for 17 years on Saturdays⁸ [once a month] so we could build a kindergarten and other production lines outside of the town. That was all made with our labour. And I want to tell you that in their psychology they were not used to working for an owner. You know ‘why should I work so that she can get rich?’ That was the main reason. And to this very day people are looking at me instead of their own job and how much they’ve worked and earned.”

Danica’s account is in many ways typical in its focus on the absurd “socialist mentality” of workers. The recourse to psychology indicates that workers have no objective reasons to lament and that the lamentation itself is devoid of logic. Instead of looking at

⁸ Danica is here referring to the so called “Solidarity Saturdays”. Workers were asked to “voluntarily” spend one Saturday of each month at work and the profits made from this work were to be used for improving the facilities for workers at the factory, i.e. child care, medical care, restaurant etc.

the larger distribution of wealth, Danica insists that workers ought to look solely at their individual achievements which are objectified in wages and perceive themselves as uniquely responsible for their actions. Her views are far from isolated and in a sense reflect the conceptual break that was being championed by managerial elites since the late eighties. Joncho, another former manager from Astibo, likewise emphasized to me that the main obstacle to progress and economic efficiency during socialism was the structural absence of individual responsibility. According to him, individuals in socialism were encouraged to fail by allowing them to “hide behind the worker’s collectives as decision making bodies”.

Also interesting in this narrative is that in both economic models Danica treats workers as possessive individuals: in communism workers "falsely" owned (or at least thought they did) the products of their own labour, whereas in capitalism they "truly" own only their labour power. The transition from one model to the other should be simple enough as soon as workers realize that during communism the state was in fact was robbing them of their ownership; whereas in capitalism they are allowed and encouraged to claim ownership of their labour power as a personal possession to be freely used, disposed of and handed to others for a price through the market (Macpherson 1962: 48). As such her criticism that workers were wrongfully “taught” that they work for themselves (i.e. that they own the end product as opposed to merely their labour) fails to capture the full picture. My claim is that when pointing out income discrepancies, workers are not so much stressing their personal autonomy as producers (by claiming ownership to what they produced). They are criticising the asocial fabric of market society as the very basis of the possessive individual which precludes the realization of “community life”, and with it, the social and moral needs of the related self. In other

words, if workers saw the transition as a movement from social to asocial inequality, Danica framed it as a movement from social inequality to market equality.

The rhetorical focus on the autonomy of the individual and the primacy of self-interest is of course the bread and butter of the neoliberal market rationality of profitability, progress and development through which emerging social inequalities become legitimized. The holistic possessive individual is accountable, measurable and answerable for his or her actions, which allows income inequalities to be repackaged as distinctions in personal “merit” (as well as for questions of age, class and gender to simply vanish). Promoting such an understanding of the self becomes part and parcel of the general program of transforming the economy. Much in the same way that markets on their own did not regulate the flow of workers from Astibo to the private factories (and depended on a combination of state help and the concerted initiative of local business interests), individual workers also required strategic interventions in order to be “interpellated as ‘free’ neoliberal subjects” required by the new workplace (Chaput & Hanan 2014: 50).

However, the rhetorical force of this discourse quickly dissolves when faced with the question: “*Whose* profitability, development and progress are being aimed at?” (Godelier 1972: 9). This, as will become increasingly evident in the remainder of this thesis, is a question that has never ceased to be asked by workers in post-socialist Macedonia with widely shared notions about the relationship between employees and employers as not just economic (selling labour power) but *social* and multifaceted (Dunn 2004: 153). Some of Danica’s workers may have ended up in literally the same working space, or doing the same job, but in a radically different context: one devoid of job security, affordable holidays, day-care facilities for children or regular wages. But perhaps more importantly, a context that failed to recognize them as moral persons, thus

depriving them of the ability to make claims on their new employers who were already seen to have amassed their wealth under profoundly dubious conditions (Graeber 2011b: 191).

In 2010 Danica was still complaining to reporters that “every day we are hoping to see a young person knocking on the doors of our factory for work, but in vain. There’s not a whiff of female workers and even the men are in short supply now. In this situation we will not be able to respond to the increased demand” (Bojadziski 2010). When I interviewed her in 2013 she claimed that the situation had barely changed and that workers are still hard to come by in spite of soaring rates of unemployment in the city.

5.4 Framing a Counter-Narrative

One of the things that immediately struck me when I started doing my research were the frequent complaints by factory owners voiced in the media about the difficulty of finding labourers. Workers may have been kicked out of their old factories but they were not necessarily rushing to join the emerging private assembly lines. Such refusals are traditionally supported by relying on support networks of kin and friends or the grey economy, but also, by putting pressure on the state and employers to redefine the meaning of employment as a multilayered social relationship rather than a purely economic one. For many workers the new workplace clearly did not meet not just their economic but their moral and social needs.

In 2004 the local daily *Utrinski Vesnik* revealed a telling paradox: Greek investors trying to open up two garment manufacturing companies could not find eighty willing employees in a region that had a registered unemployed workforce of around 22,000 (Karevski 2004). The reporter interviewed an unemployed textile technician who said:

“I would rather continue my miserable existence with the social benefits my unemployed husband receives than work in conditions that have been surpassed in the nineteenth century”. She goes on to say that “they pay for eight hours a day but make you work ten ... including on national holidays ... and if you so much as mention any union, you end up without work the following day” (ibid).

Statements such as this one filled the daily newspapers on a regular basis and contributed to a public condemnation of the new employers. They also capture the widely held sentiment that time itself was slipping *backwards* into eras consigned to history books. Rather than ushering in a new era of progress the “transition” was experienced as a drifting away from any semblance of modernity. Instead of the much flaunted new conceptual order of “market rationality” the world looked rather topsy-turvy. When I arrived in Macedonia in October 2013 to begin my fieldwork, the most common phrase that people used to describe to me the situation in the garment industry was “Slaves and slave owners, that’s what you get there”. The metaphor of slavery was something I often encountered in the factory. One time, as we were working, my partner started whistling a tune and told me: “We’re very musical here. But we don’t sing from joy. We’re just like the negroes in the cotton plantations singing the blues.” The reference to chattel slavery as a form of dehumanization is often reinforced by observations that workers are being treated like “stoka”, which in Macedonian has the double meaning of *cattle* and *commodity*.

It should come as no surprise that large sections of the workforce put up various displays of refusal to participate in the new economy, or at least a refusal to participate consentingly. If Danica’s stress on individuality is an attempt to reduce grievances to “a private affair” (Bourdieu 1977: 40), workers complaints can be seen as a set of performative utterances that try to “mobilize the largest possible group” by imposing a

“collective definition of the situation” (ibid). For workers, it is the new industrialists that are “matter out of place”; i.e. morally transgressive “thieves” or peddlers in goods who skim the profits without adding any value through their own labour (Thiessen 2010: 203). Rather than accepting a certain model of personhood as a common good we are seeing here a contest “over the social contexts (if any) in which it is appropriate to present oneself as a possessive individual” (Martin 2007: 286). Workers were, in other words, putting together their own subject categories and counter narrative that draws on the legacy and experience of the moral economy of socialism.

Such symbolically loaded downgrading of the industry has also allowed those who opt out of labour to retain the moral high ground and evade some of the common accusations of pauperism and loafing. Ironically, the very insistence on brutal exploitation as an anachronistic but factual state of affairs directly threatened the full transformation of the unemployed into “that monstrosity, an industrial reserve army, kept in misery in order to be always at the disposal of capital” (Marx 2012 [1903]: 313). As a result employers often find themselves on the back foot and coerced into making efforts to improve their public image. In 2006, three years after spearheading the dismemberment of Astibo, Vlado Netkov made the following statement:

“Every day we place ads for new workers but receive no feedback. There are not enough qualified workers in the town. The second thing that is forcing us to open factories outside Shtip is the realization that in our town an image of us has been created as public enemies, as soulless people who are unscrupulously exploiting the workers with overtime labour and supposedly low wages. This is also being supported by the town’s authorities. And this hurts us, because the people who undertook the risk to invest their capital in such uncertain transitional times to create jobs and suffer permanent insomnia, are

exposed to daily criticisms without anyone making an analysis about the validity of such criticisms” (Bojadziski 2006b).

A few month earlier, Orce Atanasov, another factory owner from Shtip, made a curious appeal to workers in a national daily newspaper:

“We need eight new seamstresses to whom we can guarantee an eight hour working day, and we’re also working on ensuring at least one non-working Saturday in the month ... In our town there are around fifty garment factories. I’m not making a big discovery if I say that exploitation in the factories is the biggest talk of the town. I want to practically prove that it is possible to have regular working hours in the factories and still earn a profit for both the workers and the owners” (Bojadziski 2006).

Atanasov certainly got one thing right: that what went on in the factories was the talk of the town. This “factory talk” was, to use Mauss’ term, a *total social phenomenon* (that gives expression at one and the same time to “all kinds of institutions”, whether moral, economic or political Mauss (1990 [1950]: 100). Or as Sykes puts it, a total social phenomenon “concentrates attention on social relations” and at the same time “constitutes those relations” (Sykes 2005: 63). The talk is most conspicuously present in public spaces in Shtip such as the main square but more importantly the promenade or *korzo* as it is locally referred, along the canal in the old centre that act as the gathering points where people socialize exchange information and experiences. The *korzo* has been a common feature of Balkan towns since the early 19th century and the word usually stands for “a public space where people go for a leisurely walk” (see Vućinič-Nešković & Miloradović 2006). The segmentation of the space itself reflects local social, political, moral and economic institutions (ibid: 231) and allows people the opportunity to “project their own social identity before known and unknown others through public presentation and interaction, and to engage with others doing the same”

(Graan 2012: 177). More importantly it allows people to performatively engage with one another in creating a “collective definition” of the social context. This is precisely what took place during my walks with my co-workers as we would stop and meet others at various points and discuss life around the factories. They would bump into old colleagues, ask about old workplaces share information about wages and employment opportunities or lack of; exchange stories of hardship, complaints about mistreatment, excessive overtime, nepotism, unpaid holidays and unrealistic quotas.

People also never missed an opportunity to point out to me and identify the affluent Other of garment manufacturing, i.e. the *nouveau riche* industrialists. Someone driving by in an expensive car would immediately be identified as the owner of a factory or member of their family. On one occasion while strolling in the city centre one of my friends pointed out to a small unfinished church, whose construction was known to be funded by a local factory owner. “Is he trying to reinvest some of the profits in the community?” I asked. “Or maybe he’s trying to seek forgiveness for his sins”, was the rhetorical reply. The very act of being a wealthy factory owner in a social environment beset by poverty and precariousness is seen as a stark moral transgression, a sin one had to atone for. The transgression would often be articulated in explicit class terms: “There are only two classes in Macedonia today: the rich and the poor. There is no longer a middle class for workers”, was a particularly common evaluation.

It might seem odd to a western ear that garment factory workers should ever consider themselves morally offended by their expulsion from a “middle class” position. The idea of being middle class, however, has very little to do with education or white collar work. The notion of middle-classness is directly inherited from the moral economy of Yugoslav consumerism as objectified through the continuous improvement in living standards under the watchful eye of a technocratic elite. In effect, privatization did away

with these webs of mutuality, or the “social inequalities” of socialism, so as to make way for an altogether different type of relation in which the new elites and workers become increasingly alienated from one another, an experience once more objectified in consumption patterns. It is precisely this distancing that is the object of criticism rather than the idea of inequality in absolute terms. The invocation of class concepts by workers should not therefore be interpreted as a call for class warfare or unity (something which most people in Shtip consider to be a perhaps noble but impossible and unworkable “ideal”), but an attempt to rework the contours of inequality so that elites can reassume their moral responsibility towards those whom they dominate. This however, is as much a practical as it is an imaginative effort to reconstitute the self in relation to others in the context of a larger social and moral whole. Peteet rightly argues that the everyday sharing of stories of suffering, interwoven with moral and evaluative judgements is an important context in which “the moral constitution of the self unfolds” (1994: 42).

5.4.1 The Myth of the “Social” Capitalist

By the time I arrived in Shtip almost anyone could give me a short version of a well-established narrative on what is happening in the town. During my first cab ride in Shtip the driver who noticed my Skopje accent inquired whether I was here on business. When I told him I was doing research on the garment industry he immediately shot off:

“You will hear a lot of things but let me give you the *people’s* account. Makedonka and Astibo were respected companies back in the day where *thousands of people and families worked and lived off*. They were huge exporters that made a good profit and gave good salaries. Then when this transition process started under Branko [Crvenkovski, PM from 1992-1998], things got out of hand. All of the former managers

and directors that held the top spots managed to get a hold on the factories they were in charge of during socialism. They got the best deals and paid nothing for the plants they got. *Not a single drop of sweat came from them in those factories but they got the best deals.* Now those who were the rich bosses back then got richer and better off and those who were the poor workers got even poorer with even less rights. They exploit them, people work overtime, on public holidays, on weekends and don't get paid for it. Salaries are irregular and very low. The managers are scum. There was one factory in Babite [neighbourhood in Shtip] where the manager had slept with or abused half of the [female] workers in the plant.

The labour inspectors don't give a shit. They come to the factory with nothing and leave with bags of stuff and don't report anything. I used to work in a factory for two years myself but I couldn't take it. I can't take all that stuff that goes on in there. I'm the rebellious type. My wife still works in one though.

You don't know that factory that shut down a few years ago. It was opened up by this German fellow who was running it for a while and he promised the workers 300 Euros salaries and other benefits, like 50 euro Christmas bonuses etc. But then he left the factory in the hands of local managers and they made a proper mess of things. They were sending money from Germany for the workers that never got to them because the managers were skimming the bonuses for themselves and paying the workers 150 Euros on top of that. When word got to Germany about what was happening the owner just shut down the factory and moved production elsewhere. Those are the people you have to work with."

This brief narrative contains four important elements that capture the morally transgressive experience of the transition, such as: theft, rape, deception and expulsion, all of which jointly constitute an account of moral decay and social disintegration, i.e. abjection. In the plot workers appear as wrongfully dispossessed of their property by an

amoral conglomerate of government and business forces. The state is personified in the face of corrupt labour inspectors. There follows a Marxist account of exploitation that seamlessly transitions into a more vivid moral transgression, namely the violation of the sanctity of female bodies by voracious managers with extreme sexual powers. The use of gendered and kin terms is more than accidental and provides the idiom to articulate the morally transgressive nature of the new workplace. It speaks of the workers' loss of control over their bodies but is also a way of rebelling against the workers' "lack of control over social relations in the factory" (Ong 1988: 34), or relations that are increasingly becoming asocial, i.e. situated beyond the limits of a binding moral community and mutual obligations. The narrative paints a grim picture that captures a widely shared experience of moral decay and social disorder. But, it also highlights a possible alternative to these perceived transgressions.

What I wish to stress here is the narrative about the German owned factory whose "redistributive" intentions got sabotaged by greedy locals to the point that it shut down. I made some further inquiries but the cab driver was unable to offer any specific details that I could follow up. I did not have to wait too long however before similar accounts started cropping up more regularly and in different contexts. The narratives all had more or less the same elements. Foreign (usually German), but sometimes also local investors would try to open up a garment factory, guaranteeing high wages, bonuses, paid holidays, maternity leave and a 40 hour working week. These efforts would inevitably be sabotaged by a scheming association of local factory owners, determined to keep wages as low as possible and profits high. Sometimes this was said to take violent proportions. One worker in the factory told me:

"Did you know the owners meet every month to talk about how they're going to set the wages and stuff like that? There was this factory owner ... I can't remember the name of

the factory but he treated his workers really well, bonuses a 13th salary and stuff like that. You know what they did? They burned his house down. He had a villa and they burned it down, the bastards, but you know, he was attracting all the best workers with his conditions.”

On no single occasion however was I able to extract any precise details about such events. No one was quite certain about the specific names of factories or persons affected by such mischief, nor when it could have occurred. I tried to do some research and after browsing through news archives I discovered that a certain factory called “In-Time-Tex”, owned by a German investor, had shut down in April of 2009. The owner, a certain Johann Van Brams, or Braus, had made “grandiose” announcements before opening up shop in 2007, and offered a minimum monthly wage of EUR200 (fairly average for Shtip), a 40 hour working week and non-working Saturdays, which stirred up some interest in the township. By 2009 he decided to close the factory, citing declining interest among his European buyers as the main reason, and made no mention of foul play (Bojadziski 2009). This only made the notion that benevolent investors were being sabotaged because of their efforts to give *higher wages* to local workers, somewhat less believable.

Workers on the other hand, never seemed to question the credibility of these accounts or the legitimacy of the accusations being hurled at employers. Sometimes this would be done very directly, such as when the president of the Association of Garment Producers, Angel Dimitrov, was being interviewed for a local TV station about the state of the garment industry. Dimitrov gave the standard expose of the industry where he mentioned the influence of competition from low income countries such as Cambodia and Bangladesh, the need to import materials for production, the focus on outsourced production instead of building local brands, and the pegging of the Denar to the Euro as

the main factors that complicate work in the garment sector. For these reasons, he went on to explain, overall production had declined by 25 percent since 2005. Raising wages, Dimitrov continued, could only be achieved by raising productivity per worker. In order to achieve this, the Association was petitioning the government for subsidies to help purchase the latest machinery for cutting and designing garment pieces, and increase the overall productivity per worker and the competitiveness of the industry.

At this point, I was taken aback when the host asked Dimitrov to comment on widespread accusations that the Association is threatening any factory owners who try to raise wages above the current average, with bodily harm and destruction of property. Dimitrov answered wryly that in the factory where he is the general manager: “we’re giving above average wages and no one has come to threaten us because of it.” In the last instance, Dimitrov reiterated that “the price of labour is dictated by the market, and that is how things work in the capitalist society that we are building.” This resort to “markets” as the final arbiters of value appeared rhetorical and immediately contradicted the previous appeal to the state for subsidies. When the host opened the telephone lines for questions from viewers Dimitrov was instantly bombarded with accusations of manipulation. One viewer asked “When will the owners allow workers to form unions in the factories?” A second one asked “What good will the workers see from the subsidies you are asking for?” A third one shouted emotionally that “The workers are in shackles, textile [production] is going back in time! Women are not home to see their children on Sundays.” No one, however, tried to offer any “evidence” that might have backed up the initial accusation.

How then, in the light of what has been said here, are we to approach the stories about these “social capitalists” that are constantly being undermined by local elites? Are we dealing with mere gossip that, as Gluckman suggests, is trying to “maintain the unity,

morals and values” of the social group (1963: 308)? This can hardly be the case, since very little of what goes on in Shtip is about maintaining old organic unities, and is mostly about defining new relations between emerging social fragments. I believe that the narrative of the “social capitalist” is best approached as a part of a larger myth-in-the-making. Going back to Ferguson’s definition, a myth is not just a flawed account of reality (as opposed to “history”), but a “cosmological blueprint that lays down fundamental categories and meanings for the organization of experience” (Ferguson 1999: 13). A myth however, is not just inherited or unsettled. It is also made, remade and redeployed in new contexts and in response to new social experiences. The myth of the “social capitalist” has force because condenses in one and the same narrative the multiple and often contradictory aspects of life in the garment industry. It is actively shaping a new context in which social experiences of work are being articulated and in which social relationships between employers, workers and the state are contested and redefined (cf. Ries 1997: 21, cited in Zigon 2008: 140). It identifies transgressions of social order and offers possibilities for overcoming them, or at least, identifies different ways of structuring relations between those involved.

The scattered stories may lack constative value, but they nonetheless carry an internal coherence and a performative force (Austin 1962). A clear distinction emerges in them between the “social capitalist”, who goes out of her way to respond to workers’ substantive needs, and the “asocial capitalist” who relates to workers through the medium of markets. It is also a way for workers to challenge the legitimacy of market ideology, which in any case is only strategically deployed whenever it suits the needs of owners. Wages, for example, are not seen as something determined by impersonal markets but by scheming capitalists behind closed doors. But we should not look here for the hidden Marxists, employing a primitive critique of capitalism (Taussig 2010:

10). This criticism does not reflect some kind of longing for an egalitarian socialist utopia or personal autonomy. On the contrary, through such narratives that contain a shared experience, workers are attaching value to a new form of dependence on the “social capitalist”. This clearly highlights their unequal position to employers, but is also socially much “thicker” than the crude impersonality provided by the selling and buying of labour (Ferguson 2013: 236). Dimitrov on the other hand, only manages to recognize workers in the most socially minimal way as commodities that may or may not have a market value and workers would have none of it. This shows that workers are to a considerable extent capable of imposing their own context as opposed to merely internalizing and operating within the given categories of the neoliberal “unitary language” (Bakhtin 1981).

Perhaps one immediate social result of this can be seen in the manner in which employment is procured. In my entire eleven month stay in Shtip, I failed to meet one single garment worker that gained employment in the garment industry by responding to an ad or some similarly impersonal manner. Entry into the garment sector is almost exclusively mediated through networks of friends and kin. That is to say, employers usually mobilize their existing workforce to recruit new workers through these networks which has the immediate consequence of making the social experience of garment work considerably “thicker”. Bringing in new workers can increase one’s leverage and social standing in the factory, but also being “brought in” can provide a social cushion for new employees. And this is precisely what leads to those minimal concessions identified at the beginning of this chapter. We cannot reduce such instances to manifestations of “old socialist thinking”. There is a long way to go from the self-managed firm to the patronage of private entrepreneurs. But it is still in some ways a move away from total abjection.

5.5 The Black Book

The strategies outlined above that developed largely out of workers' relations and experiences with private employers were also adopted by unions who sought to direct them into a dialogue with the receding state. In the beginning of 2006, Andon Majhoshev, acting in his capacity as the president of the local Union branch in Shtip, edited and published a small booklet called *The Black Book, Stories From Shtip and Karbinci*. The booklet is a collection of short statements by local town folk who experienced the demise of the socialist industrial giants and found themselves either with no work or in a very different working environment. Majhoshev described to me the serendipitous occasion of its inception:

“I was sitting in my union office and a couple of the workers who lost their jobs from the old enterprises and were unemployed for several years came up to see me. They were seriously distraught because of their situation, and one of the women asked me ‘Is there a black book somewhere where I can write down my suffering so I can get this heavy burden off my soul?’ And I happened to have a black notebook in the drawer in my desk and I said yes I have a black book! And that's when I got the idea that workers should write down their stories so that people can hear them. And then it wasn't difficult to get more people to come over and write down their stories and get statements. People wanted to come so they can be heard. I gathered about 142 stories of which we included about 100 in the black book. I then distributed the books to all the major political parties and officials and even journalists came and took interest in the Black Book. I even met with the then Minister for Social Care and Labour as part of our negotiations between the union and the government and gave him a copy. I remember him saying ‘Let us hope there will be no more Black Books to write.’”

What the minister received was a series of short statements that together represent a litany of complaints and accounts of hardship, suffering, humiliation and uncertainty

with the future peppered with expressions of solidarity. Majhoshev gathered a total of 147 statements, 73 from men and 74 from women, 85 percent of which were aged between 41-60 years which meant that the vast majority of those included came of age and had a history of employment during socialism. The statements are divided into four main sections, those being: workers from bankrupt former SOE's, garment industry workers, pensioners and public sector workers. The book does well to capture the diverging categories of workers that were being released on the labour market, each with different challenges and priorities, but whose appeals nonetheless shared the same underlying logic of seeking out new forms of dependence. The majority of the statements are addressed directly to the state, personified by politicians and the labour inspectors immediately charged with the responsibility of eradicating economic abuses.

In a tradition very familiar to anthropologists, Majhoshev writes in the introduction that the purpose of the book is to provide "vulnerable citizens" with "a space where they can voice their anger and disenchantment due to the accumulated social problems and at the same time give them hope that someone will read about them and help them." That "someone" is explicitly defined as the "relevant state institutions" that have turned a deaf ear to the plight of workers. He adds that "the best part of these people have never been asked how they live, how they feel and what are their expectations of the future." The act of giving voice to the voiceless and simply being "listened to" is presented as a starting point for change and improvement and is even seen as having the potential of becoming a "new form of union struggle".

A fifty year old male former employee in a socially owned firm wrote: "If during socialism we were seeing in the dark, in today's pluralist democracy and freedom we do not see at all. We are left without work, without existential means, and many young people abandoned us and went abroad. All of the above is in my opinion the result of

bad politics, corruption and anarchy.” This description of the transition directly translates the experience of “disorder” on a cosmological scale. In their focus on human tragedy as an onset of chronic suffering, they trace the experience of a ritual passage from subject to outcast (ibid) and are a form of protest against the loss of social status and the protracted state of *liminality* (Caraveli-Chaves 1980: 138, cited in Fishman 2008: 272).

Another former employee in the garment manufacturing giant Astibo wrote: “I was left with no employment from Astibo after 30 years of working. My husband is also unemployed. He works on the black market for [three Euros] a day. We have two children who are students. We’ve had to recall one of them as we cannot support his studies anymore. I am very disappointed about the conditions in the country because together with my husband we have worked for a combined 63 years and now we are *on the street*⁹. I am unhappy because my children are unhappy and apathetical and want to go abroad to work. The government has to do something to stop the children from leaving abroad. I feel we are losing the future of the country. If they shorten the maternity leave to three months or to six I think that the *Macedonian nation will vanish*. That has to be stopped.”

A 59 year old garment factory worker wrote: “My son and daughter in law are unemployed. They have only one child. They do not want to have another because they have no work. If the crisis continues in this way soon the population will grow old and

⁹ The closing of the factories and the experience of becoming surplus labour is usually described as “being left on the street”. This is not a reference to homelessness which is an exceptionally rare consequence of unemployment. Most workers in Shtip (of all generations) still reside in extended family households capable of providing a roof for several generations of family members. It is instead a reference to being deprived of a workplace that used to be the converging point of people’s social universe; leaving workers to aimlessly wonder the streets to fill in empty time (see Graan 2012: 179). This usually legitimate leisure activity loses its meaning when separated from its opposite, i.e. some kind of productive enterprise and becomes a symptom of social decay ultimately embodied in the former workers.

there will be no one left to replace the current workers.” Two younger garment workers in their thirties wrote: “I feel humiliated because my boss is breaking my *basic human rights* so that I cannot raise my children as I should because he keeps me at work all day”; “I am very sad because my children grew up without a mother because I work all day in the garment factory. I feel I am losing control over them and that they no longer feel I am their mother”. A former worker from Astibo with 28 years of working experience wrote that for her family time was also slipping backwards and out of modernity with the closing of Astibo: “Our only son has become depressed. He wants to leave the country. You should know that as an honest family we are very disappointed and every other month they switch off our electricity and we eat with candles and live like in the middle ages.”

A key recurring element in the statements is the introduction of the national dimension. What it highlights is the gradual relaxing of the Marxist language of class and proletarianization to make space for the (ever growing) discourse of the national community and the corollary language of kinship. Instead of a corporate “class” workers here become an inseparable and vital part of the national community and the “health” of workers becomes directly linked to the “health” of the nation. The shift is significant in that it allows workers to tap into a pool of widely shared symbols of the (imagined) moral community of the nation as the “listener”. Women, who represent the more likely garment factory workers, are particularly important in the value matrix of the nation as responsible for its social and biological reproduction. As a result, complaints about female overtime labour and exploitation in the factories focuses on the disruption this cause in the unpaid economy of household labour. The lack of “worker’s rights” translates into an interference of the basic tasks of rearing the next generation.

The last section of the booklet contains statements from civil servants employed in the public administration expressing their support for the plight of factory workers and are inserted as examples of “listening”. One of them, identified only as a 29 year old woman states “I work in a public enterprise and I am doing well, but I stand behind the workers who have no rights, work all day long, are not paid for it and are humiliated, disenfranchised and terrified.”

As Zigon points out, complaints can be seen as doing a kind of “ethical work” by explicitly identifying a moral transgression for the listener, and thereby, bringing them “into the context of the transgressive moment” (ibid: 141). As such, the laments are directed above all at a listener who is assumed to share the moral assumptions of the disenfranchised, such as the fictitious kinship community of co-nationals (Alexopoulos 2003: 115). We can thus look at the short statements in the Black Book as a cluster of performative speech acts working on social reality by working on, and mobilizing, others. Through their complaints expressed in the Black Book, workers are not just addressing the state but mobilizing the discourse of the national community, and the traditional gender norms built into it, in order to situate themselves within a larger whole.

This “connecting” of economic activity with the moral community of the nation and the gender norms governing the intimate work of reproduction, allows workers to link their interests with the interests of “society” as a whole. The hope is that by reciprocating the indignation the listeners will participate in the collective recognition of a moral disorder and its condemnation. On the one hand, this allows workers to “transcend ... the limits of purely economic class” and contest the co-option of the State as the organ of one particular group, i.e. the new capitalists (see Gramsci 1992: 181-182). But in doing so workers consciously step away from the idea of class unity and autonomy, reify

established gender hierarchies at home and in the workplace, and cement the patriarchal image of the state-as-guardian (not to mention further alienate non-nationals from the struggle.) The reason this is not seen as problematic, however, is precisely because within such forms of dependence workers can at least be recognized as moral persons towards which those in power have *some* kind of obligations that go beyond the mere exchange of labour for cash on the market (Graeber 2011b: 191). As Ferguson remarks, “for those thus abjected, *subjection* can only appear as a step up” (2013: 231; italics in original). With this in mind, I now turn to another struggle of the abjected: that of the labouring surplus.

Chapter VI: Discarding Labour

6.1 The Labouring Surplus

Having discussed the category of workers that seek to redefine relations of dependence in production, I would now like to turn to the second category brought up in the introduction. Namely, those workers with very little or no prospects of ever being reabsorbed in the economy. This category of workers was represented in the Black Book, in the shape of former veteran workers from defunct socially owned enterprises. Most of these workers were in their mid to late fifties when the final wave of privatization “released” them on the labour market only to discover “their very limited relevance to capital” (Li 2009: 67). Their refusal to be left at the mercy of the “free” labour market and consequent struggle to wrangle some concessions from the state managed to transform the “stealthy violence” (ibid) they faced into a protracted media event that shaped public debates regarding the legitimacy of the new economic (dis)order. The workers had been part of the larger movement that had withered away after 2002 and had splintered off as a separate interest group. The core of the movement was composed of former Makedonka workers, made redundant with the liquidation of the factory in 2002. By 2004 the position of many had become particularly dire. According to existing bankruptcy laws workers aged less than 55 years received welfare for no more than 18 months after the liquidation of their enterprise, after which the amount dwindled to a bare minimum leaving them to fend for themselves.

Under the leadership of Stojan Stojanov, a seasoned textiles technician from Makedonka with experience as a union leader from the nineties, they formed the laboriously named “Association of Workers with over 25 Years of Work Experience and an *Unresolved Status*”. The very name of the association strongly emphasized the

liminal position of veteran socialist workers in the new political economy, i.e. the acutely perceived lack of a designated social status. In this sense the name was chosen more to reflect the actual experience of workers as “rejected matter in search of a place” rather than to lend itself to witty acronyms for political campaigning. The decision to register as an actual association, with an official membership and a designated leadership who could act as legal representatives of a political cohort, was made only after Stojanov and others were persuaded by a local politician that this was the only way any government could take them seriously.

“He told us that once you register an association you can start negotiating with the institutions and they will not be able to kick you out or deny you, they will have to talk to you. So we first registered the association here in Shtip, they chose me as the president and then we began to make our presence known in the media and to branch out in other towns. We had branches in 99 percent of towns in Macedonia. They all had a branch leader and a membership, with membership cards and so on.”

Stojanov also told me that reporters had found the laborious moniker of the Association too impractical and were responsible for coining and popularizing the much shorter term *stechajci* (стечајци – pronounced *ste-chay-tsi*) – which can roughly be translated as “the bankrupt ones”¹⁰. The term *stechajci* had already been in use for some time to refer to all workers made redundant in bankrupt socialist enterprises. As such it carried significant symbolic weight that the members of the association had serendipitously monopolized with the help of the media in their search for a catchy label.

¹⁰ The term is a derivative of the noun *stechaj* (стечај) meaning bankruptcy and the plural suffix *-ci*, which transforms the noun into another kind of noun that attributes relational properties to persons: e.g. *Astibo* (name of a factory) – *Astibovci* (people working in that factory); *stechaj* (bankruptcy) – *stechajci* (people associated with bankrupt firms) (see Geertz 1983: 65, for a similar discussion).

6.2 Pleading the Nation

It was already in use during their first important media appearance at the end of 2005. On December 31st around five hundred *stechajci* from Makedonka and Astibo organized a public New Year's Eve celebration on the main city square in Shtip. With homemade foods and drinks spread out on improvised tables workers organized a spectacle of irony for the country's media. Workers brought instruments to form the "bankrupt orchestra" (стечаен оркестар) and sang popular folk songs thematically chosen to express sorrow, misery and destitution. The songs drew on the rich symbolic pool of a Macedonian national ideology replete with narratives of historical injustice, martyrdom and endurance against great odds. Songs such as "Macedonians where are you now" for example narrate and lament the exodus of Slav Macedonians from Greek Macedonia in the aftermath of the civil war in Greece¹¹. They highlight themes such as the loss of one's homestead and the fate of the exiled forced to roam the world with no secure social ties as the pinnacle of suffering. As such they relate to workers liminal experiences of *abjection* and are invoked to appeal to the wider moral community of the nation to recognize their plight. The reporter who covered the event highlighted two more songs that workers jointly sung, those being "Mother why was I born so poor" and "Mother why have you given birth to me". Both are popular and well known folk songs that question the purpose of existence itself in the context of material deprivation and the separation from one's homestead:

Oh mother, why you have given birth to me,
Your whole life you haven't seen me,
A male child you've born,
And given joy to another,

¹¹ See Danforth & Boeschoten (2012), for a detailed account of this complex historical episode.

Day and night I wonder,
 I sing, I dance, I play and I cry,
 And I always see your face,
 Your debts I must return,
 Debts upon debts I must return,

Be joyful dear mother,
 For you've born a lucky star,
 I will shine mother like glitter,
 For my homeland mother,
 For my homeland

The song is commonly referred to as “migratory” (*pechalbarska*), and is referring to the hardships of having to leave one's homestead in pursuit of employment that became a common practice at the turn of the nineteenth century. The opening question frames the account of suffering that follows later as devoid of meaning. It questions the purpose of existence itself when separated from loved ones and the tragedy of a child deprived from a mother's embrace and affections. The second stanza carries this questioning forward by reflecting on kinship as both the object and subject of loss. The migrant both longs to see his kin but also knows that it is precisely for their material safety that he is away, i.e. to supply remittances for the family. In the third stanza the singer at last fully identifies with his pain and finds joy in his longing and sacrifice for his homeland. It is tempting here to follow Geertz (1973: 104) and interpret this blending of suffering and the communal life of the nation as mainly a quest for meaning. Or that the question is not how to avoid suffering but how to frame it in “systems of meaning” that enable

“patterns of sociality” to take place for the sake of an assumed “teleology of community life” (ibid; see also discussion by Herzfeld 2001: 221). However, pain and suffering are not perceived by workers as randomly produced by the contingencies of everyday life but as the willed project of human structures of power. If workers are un-eased by their liminality and abjection it is not for the sake of reintroducing “order” or a certain cosmology in which they can “know how to suffer” (Geertz 1973: 104). The voice here is not in the passive, as in Job’s plea, patiently awaiting for meaning to reveal itself. It tears suffering away from debilitating passivity and tosses it into action, blending suffering with protest.

As in virtually all nationalisms, there are strong structural links in Macedonia between the logic of kinship and that of the nation-state (see Herzfeld 2001: 120). The nation-state is most often spoken of metaphorically through the idiom of kinship. As such, the song does well to express the laments of workers whom the state first embraced and then rejected from its care and nurture. Its priorities and affection have now shifted elsewhere pushing workers to seek their fortunes abroad, far from kin and home where they will have to redeem the wrongs of others. Additionally, the metaphor of kinship offers a widely shared symbolic content that is not just used for political sloganeering but also to bring in the wider national community as answerable to the moral transgression taking place. Through the public display of destitution the *stechajci* could thus open up and explore “the tensions inherent in the fact that they belong to a community, yet may not share equally in its benefits” (Herzfeld 2001: 211). In taking the centre stage they were not only asking for the reassertion of order but exploring alternative possibilities (ibid). This is seen in their mobilization of the discourse of the nation in support of economic rights, following the loss of currency of the language of class in the new political economy.

6.3 The “Right to Live”

One participant told the reporter "We're not really in the mood for celebrations. But what can we do at home? This way we can at least clear our dark thoughts a bit. I'm 56 years old and have 33 years of work experience. The new owners simply won't employ older workers and I won't be eligible for a pension for another eight years. We live, if you can call that living, with my wife's salary of 6000 denars [EUR100] and we have a student child to support as well." Two former female workers from Makedonka and Astibo complained that "some of us cannot afford to buy bread anymore. The government, as they promised before the elections have to secure some kind of financial help so that we can survive until retirement." Stojanov made one of his first addresses to the government: "We are poor but our spirit cannot be broken. We are expecting the prime minister ... who is supposed to meet with us on the 5th of January, to give us specific solutions to regulate our status. Otherwise we will start playing a different tune." (Dnevnik 2006).

Majhoshev, present in his capacity as the local Union branch president told the reporters that "these people built the factories, for years their contributions filled the budget and it's not right for them to be on the street now." (ibid). Stojanov echoed these words when he stated a few months later that "This is not about privileges and benefits, but finding some new way to survive, a right we have earned with our long years of labouring in the firms that were ruined through no fault of our own" (Dnevnik 2006b).

What Stojanov articulated here was a moral claim on the "right to live" that drives the life-saving interventions of the welfare state (Li 2009: 79) but also undermines the imperatives of neoliberal capitalism by threatening the emergence of a "free" market in labour (ibid). For the *stechajci* however, the "right to live" was not just a matter of

securing material resources but also the right to be recognized and valued as moral persons within some larger system of social relations. Their claims did not go unchallenged in public debates as citizens and economic commentators in the media questioned why exactly should a special category be carved out for them from the general mass of the unemployed (see Gorgevski 2008). Legal experts considered the constitutionality of such a move and World Bank and IMF representatives disputed the very idea of burdening the state with such obligations and disrupting the market regulation of labour, or dismissed the demands as an anachronistic remnant of the rotten socialist legacy that ruined the economy in the first place.

Stojanov told me that the Minister for Labour and Social Policy had on one occasion asked him why he did not sell his house and use the money to start his own business, a suggestion that left him bewildered: “Sell my house? Wait a minute. Is he mad I thought to myself?” This statement captures the incredulity produced by the idea that everything could in theory be subsumed by self-interested short-term exchange. Households in Shtip are not inimical to exchange, but they are usually associated with “long-term exchange”, concerned less with the individual pursuit of wealth, and more with the reproduction of long term social order (Bloch & Parry 1989: 2; Carrier 1995: 203). They are the central loci where normative aspects of gender are reproduced and obligations to kin are objectified (Rheubottom 1980). Most households in Shtip are inherited from past generations and are to be passed on to the next. Converting the household into an object of short-term exchange for the purposes of acquiring individual wealth represented not only a transgression, but a further slide towards abjection that Stojanov, and many like him, were not willing to entertain.

Determined to reclaim their social value, members of the movement from Shtip and three other neighbouring towns began another wave of disruptions. All major roads in

the area were blocked along with various government buildings in the towns. One representative stated that “these people are protesting so that their *suffering can be heard*, to which the government has turned a deaf ear” (Dnevnik 2006c; my emphasis). The prime minister remained silent but the president of parliament offered to meet with the Association to discuss the possibility of passing a law for their case. Within a month victory appeared at hand as parliament voted in favour of a law to secure financial support for the *stechajci*. Ironically, the law was proposed by no other than the newly formed party of the former Prime Minister Georgievski whose government had five years before annulled a law in place that guaranteed state money for workers of bankrupt state firms until their reemployment. Concerns crept up as many feared this to be yet another pre-electoral scam.

Such worries turned out to be justified when only two days later the veteran politician and incumbent President of the Republic, Branko Crvenkovski refused to sign the passing of the law at the request of the Social Democrat government¹². The official explanation was that the government had not checked the exact numbers of workers that would have to be compensated through the law. The Association had insisted that the number was no more than 6,000 but after conducting their own estimates the government concluded that over 17,000 workers would become entitled to financial support with the passing of the law. The IMF had immediately threatened to break off the stand-by arrangement it had with the government prompting panic among politicians. The minister of Labour and Social Policy announced that the law “goes against Macedonia’s international obligations and threatens to undermine the reforms

¹² Crvenkovski was also the long standing president of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia, the party in office and prime minister during the years of privatization from 1992 to 1998.

and arrangements with the World Bank and the IMF. It also brings into question the opening of negotiations for full EU membership.” (Dnevnik 2006d).

The government had made itself clear: this is simply beyond us and that appeasing the *stechajci* would not only offend the gods of international capital but disturb the geopolitics of EU integration. The more grounded *stechajci* demanded to speak to representatives of the WB and the IMF to explain themselves and asked the president not to succumb to their pressures. Georgievski claimed that the government’s explanations were insubstantial and that at any measure they should be more concerned with the plight of their people than the IMF (Kanal 5 2006). He also sent a reminder that his government had done precisely that six years earlier when it decided to give state assistance to victims of the pyramid scheme (whilst ignoring the very same people whose interests he was championing now as an opposition leader).

The government offered an alternative plan to assist the *stechajci* to find employment by subsidizing all contributions and tax related expenses of firms that choose to employ *stechajci*. This was swiftly refused by the Association as an inefficient measure as it would leave them dependent on employers reluctant to hire aging and unskilled labourers. The proposal was also criticized by the Union of Employers whose representative complained that the government had not consulted them even though “we are the ones that have to do the employing” (Dnevnik 2006e), which only seemed to confirmed fears that the *stechajci* were an undesirable surplus in relation to capital.

After auditing the lists of workers from bankrupt enterprises that the law would consider the government came up with a new definite number of approximately eight thousand *stechajci* and offered various levels of support corresponding to the economic and social position of each family unit rather than the flat 100 Euros per worker. It had also

reduced the maximum sum a person could receive to 80 Euros which according to the new regulations would mean that fewer than five hundred workers would receive the maximum amount. What proved to be even more controversial for the *stechajci* was the government's decision to distribute this money through the department for social care rather than the employment agency as demanded by workers. The offer was expressly turned down. "The way they treat us is humiliating, as if we were not the people who built the factories for decades which they ruined. To get a little money for a piece of bread we now have to ask for charity in the centers for social care", said Stojanov. This refusal left the government somewhat puzzled and in a position to claim that the *stechajci* simply did not want a solution. But their refusal should not be so puzzling.

6.4 Seeking Dependence

Following Mauss (1990), state assistance can be seen as a form of exchange that is not merely expressive but constitutive of a particular social relationship between two parties (in this case "workers" and "the state"). We can extend the argument to suggest that it is constitutive of the self in relation to others. Social aid however is popularly perceived in Macedonia as a form of charity and being a "social case" is an extremely demeaning label, indicating a socially inept and helpless individual that is incapable of meaningful interaction. It is an *unreciprocable* gift "that makes the person who has accepted it inferior, particularly when it has been accepted with no thought of returning it" (Mauss 1990: 83). The trouble with charity then is that it is a completely one-sided relationship, in the sense that it imposes no enduring social ties or mutual obligations between giver and recipient (Graeber 2011b: 109). The charitable giver *expects nothing in return* and is in theory, free to walk away and discontinue the transaction at any point. In other

words, charity fails to recognize the related person and can instead only recognize an object, and leave the *stechajci* hanging in their liminal social space and in a continuing crisis of personhood. It would also fail to recognize them as able bodied wage earners with at least the potential for eventually finding some sort of formal employment, which is particularly important for male workers due to their traditional role as breadwinners (cf Ferguson 2013: 235). In short, social aid could provide some material assistance for the *stechajci* but would fail to attend to their “social and moral needs” (ibid).

By contrast, channelling money through the employment agency can be seen as a form of redistributive exchange, that once again establishes a hierarchical relationship of dependence between non-equals, but in a way that involves obligations for both parties. Receiving aid from the employment agency implies, at the very least, that the recipient is an able bodied person who is expected, at some point in the future, to reciprocate part of the aid she is receiving (by earning a taxable income for example). It also recognizes people as past contributors with a history of relations; i.e. as social persons with the ability to make claims on those they are dependent on. It would mean recognizing their previous labours (“we built the factories”) and the webs of mutual obligations these generated.

The Association therefore offered its own version of a settlement according to which the monthly payment would come through the employment agency until an opportunity for employment is offered. The amount would depend on the years of work experience of the worker, the lowest being 60 Euros for those with 25 years of experience and 70 Euros for those with more than 35 years of experience. The government, however, refused and the negotiations came to an end with threats of further protests in the capital.

When Vlado Netkov dismissed the *stechajci* as lazy loafers from “another time” in an interview for a local daily, the Association immediately gathered in protest in front of his garment factory in Shtip with the entire town’s membership. He was informed by the leadership that that he should either give them all work in his factory that very moment or keep his mouth shut. A publically humiliated Netkov apologized and promised to refrain from making derisive comments about the *stechajci* from thereon (Bojadziski 2007). This episode is fondly remembered by workers in the town as one of the few occasions where the new employers were put in their place. But what was their place? Once again we see employers rather than “markets” being envisaged as directly responsible for allocating resources, in this case labour. Netkov and the Association were clearly speaking a different language. Netkov was criticising the *stechajci* for seeking dependence instead of acting as autonomous individuals on the free labour market and taking charge of their autonomous economic destinies. The *stechajci* refused to subscribe to a model that reduced them to abjection in the first place.

The association was prompted into further action when Pero Eftimov, a former Makedonka worker, took his life by hanging himself in his home. The newspaper reported that Eftimov had taken his life “from great grief because he was unable to afford to pay for his daughter’s wedding” (ibid). Once more the language of kinship illustrated the deep cutting social effects of economic decline and provided the symbolic platform to speak out to the wider community. A wedding is usually a costly event, not least because the bride’s father is obliged to endow her with an adequate dowry. The dowry is traditionally given as compensation for the maiden’s contributions to her natal household (Rheubottom 1980: 230). More than a gift, it is a debt owed to her, whose payment symbolizes the bride’s passage to another household. Eftimov’s death highlighted the tragic extent to which changes in economic conditions were disrupting

the most intimate forms of kinship obligations and disabling the ritual performance of important life-cycle ceremonies (see Rio 2014: 178).

Within a few months the workers had decided to make a permanent display of their suffering bodies by pitching tents on the lawns opposite the parliament building in a repeat of the tactics that failed six years before. Raised in the middle of the capital's new burgeoning business district, the makeshift tents, sometimes consisting of little more than a few blankets tossed over wooden poles, that housed the worn out yet determined figures of the *stechajci* stood as a painful reminder of the "other side" of economic reform. Workers lined up to give their statements to reporters. When asked how they were supporting themselves workers told reporters that nearby residents sympathetic to their plight gave small donations as well as food and drinks and even children on their way to school gave parts of their lunch money. "The suited businessmen with leather shoes and briefcases haven't given us a penny and stare at us as if we were criminals." (Tomikj 2007). An image was being painted of suffering industrial workers, sympathetic co-citizens and caring youth on one end, with villainous politicians and that iconic vanguard of the new order – middle class professionals donning mobile phones and computers, occupying "clean" office activities and garnering the attention of the media (cf Kideckel 2002: 123-4) - on the other.

In an interview Stojanov complained that they had been subject to frequent attacks in the park. "We asked the police to send some people here for our protection and the interior ministry told us that they're not a security agency. Can you believe that? Are they a security agency when they send hundreds of police officers to guard the houses of the [factory owners] whenever we stage a protest?" (Jovanova 2008). Fifty eight year old Dragi Zdravkov from a bankrupt porcelain and ceramics factory stated "I have two sons with university education both with no work. My wife works but she hasn't

received her salary for a year. I want to work, I feel healthy enough. I show up at the employment agency regularly but they've never offered me a job. Who wants to employ pensioners? I hope the government will be virtuous and find a solution for us, if not we are going all the way." Other workers shared their histories and spoke of the "criminal privatization process" by rampant profiteering businessmen, unpaid salaries and layoffs as the only rewards for a lifetime of labouring in the factories (ibid).

These statements were no longer addressed to the Social Democrats who had once again lost the elections in late 2006 to the conservative IMRO-DPMNU now led by Nikola Gruevski. Initial responses from the new government were not encouraging. The prime minister reiterated that the *stechajci* can only be helped by promoting employment opportunities (ibid). Stojanov told one reporter that some time ago already, the Association announced that they are willing to accept a loan of 3000 Euros per workers, and pool this money in order to start up a business. The government however, would have to provide the management team to set it up and run it for the *stechajci*. Stojanov added: "We are not capable of that. We cannot be businessmen, but we can and we want to work" (Jovanova 2008). This suggestion in effect sought to replicate a socialist style moral relation of mutual dependence between workers and managers with the necessary know-how to organize economic activity for the benefit of everyone. As such, it did it was not even considered by a government committed to the implementation of market reforms and eager to erase any remaining vestiges of "socialist mentality". The *stechajci* however continued to occupy the space opposite the parliament building as a stubborn iconic reminder of the failed "transition". The frequent appearance in the media of their shabby tents, ragged clothes and worn out hungry faces in the heart of the country's political and business district gradually transformed them into a genuine political

nuisance. They stood as a lingering reminder and iconic representation of the failed Macedonian worker and the pitfalls of the new economic order.



Fig. 7. The *stechajci* in front of the parliament building

6.5 Legality or Morality

Faced with early elections after less than two years in office the government was pushed into reassessing its hard line approach. In a bid to secure votes Prime Minister Gruevski made an offer to the leadership of the association that should his party win the upcoming elections the state will pay 80 Euros a month for all workers who worked at least twenty five years in SOEs where the state was the dominant shareholder at time they were laid off and only if that occurred in the period between 7th of April 2000 and 31st of December 2004 (Dnevnik 2008). The initial estimates of both sides included no more than six thousand workers which mirrored the original estimates of the association. The agreement was signed by Gruevski and Stojanov who remained sceptical in the light of previous broken promises they had received.

Much to everyone's surprise, after winning the local and presidential elections, Gruevski's VMRO expressly approved the law in parliament on the 14th of July 2009 and the following week the Prime Minister personally attended the ceremony in the park where the long standing tents were being dismantled by jubilant workers eager to return to their families after seventeen months of camping in front of parliament. Gruevski promised that the government agencies would immediately start preparing the lists of workers who are to receive welfare and all the necessary documentation. The occasion reeked of a small but significant victory for the working classes.

The celebration however was short lived. Only two months after the tents were dismantled workers from Makedonka in Shtip where Stojanov himself had worked, were up in arms as none of them had received positive notifications. Workers from Astibo were more fortunate. Stojanov stated he did not know where the problem might have arisen while others were already accusing him of treason. The government assured Stojanov that the reason they are late with processing the applications lay in the difficulties of gathering all the necessary documentation that would determine the ownership status of firms at the time of their liquidation.

The government commission did eventually manage to clear all the lists and instead of six thousand they produced a list of slightly over two thousand workers. The Association demanded answers. After a meeting with government representatives Stojanov made a somewhat resigned public statement that differed from his usual defiant approach:

“The meeting with the prime minister was meant to give us answers to the questions that trouble the *stechajci*, about how far the new law has been implemented with which these *martyrs* of the transition were meant to receive a minimal social security. We asked for this meeting because the biggest part of our membership is showing signs of great revolt

after learning that, instead of six thousand, this law will cover only between two to three thousand workers. The government is constantly looking for ways to reduce this number which is a cause of revolt among us. I must admit that we carelessly fell into the government's trap by signing up to a law that allows the government to interpret and implement it in ways that suit them. [The workers] knew that the law only covers those firms that at the moment they were liquidated were dominantly state owned. But with the government's analysis it turned out that in half of those firms [on our list] the state was not the dominant shareholder, and that the workers in them owned the shares! The irony is that none of those workers had any idea that they were shareholders, not even when their firm was liquidated" (Tomikj and Bojadziski 2008).

This turn of events only showed the profound conceptual differences between aging workers and the new state. The government skilfully took advantage of the worker's lack of legal literacy and familiarity with the legal maze of property rights and ownership that arose during the privatization. Even though management buyouts dominated the privatization of large industrial SOEs, oftentimes managers who found themselves unable to muster the required capital were forced to expand the number of shares and distribute them to workers before going bankrupt (Slaveski 1997: 39). "At the same time" Drakulevski writes "shareholders were not in a position to intervene" as "in most cases management of the firm does not allow access to data on capital structure" (2002: 12). In the case of Makedonka, Stojanov put the blame precisely on the management structures and told me that the board of managers had decided to transform Makedonka into a joint-stock company with each workers receiving a certain amount of shares. All this without explaining to workers what it meant to have "shares" in a firm, nor how that differed from the socialist rhetoric of self-management in which workers were likewise symbolically referred to as "owners".

From the point of view of workers, owning shares in a virtually bankrupt company with no interested investors in sight was of little economic or political consequence. Not only could they not trade them for a profit but the privatisation of the firm was being managed by state appointed officials. As Stojanov said, “There were some firms that were joint-stock but had nothing, no assets. Workers did not get anything and the state was selling them. How were they supposed to know they were the owners?” As far as workers were concerned the state still had a responsibility towards them and the firm. These were unsettled debts that the state had a moral obligation to recognize. In other words, workers were mainly operating on a moral logic in which the finer legal distinctions between socially owned, state owned, or worker owned meant little in contrast to the social obligations of the state and employers vis-à-vis themselves.

In any event, those left out of the deal were outraged. Nikola Poplazarov, a former worker in Makedonka told reporters “Makedonka went bankrupt on the 31st of December 2001 and was then liquidated. All five thousand workers were on the employment agency’s list and we received eighteen months of support after the liquidation. The factory was state owned, and with that meets all the conditions for financial support. Our plant was later on privatized and the new owners kept only twenty workers. No one told us that we were shareholders, nor gave us any money like [in other transformed firms]” (Shatevski 2008).

Trajan Markov, the branch leader of the Association in Sveti Nikole near Shtip wrote a public letter accusing Stojanov of selling them out. The firm in which he had worked for twenty five years had also been privatized in the last two years of its existence, which disqualified him from the scope of the agreement with the government. In his address through the media Markov made one more appeal to the state to uphold its responsibility towards those that the new economic order refused to recognize: “With

this law they have tricked other members as well who together with me, fought for the realization of their rights with protests in front of the Parliament of the Republic. We demand that the law is altered so that all of us with over 25 years of work experience can be covered by it. Otherwise, we no longer have the strength to protest and put up tents again, but we will express our outrage in front of international monitors and ask them to help in the pursuit of *our right to life and a piece of bread*” (Utrinski Vesnik 2008).

6.6 Aftermath

Thompson is certainly right in arguing that the disenfranchised do not simply absorb the ideology of the ruling elites and are capable of formulating their own “moral economies” that challenge the dominant. But it is difficult to maintain that this antagonism necessarily pours out of and represents the larger dynamics of class struggle, or that it was a manifestation of workers autonomy in the strictest sense. The *stechajci* never fought for autonomy but to be recognized by the big Other as moral persons with a “right to live”, and thereby mitigate the deleterious effects that labour commoditization had on their lives. In articulating their plight they borrowed indiscriminately from the Marxist rhetoric of self-management as well as the more reactionary symbolism of the nation and a patriarchal understanding of gender, both of which reify certain hierarchies whilst challenging others. Ultimately, the *stechajci* were *consciously* separating themselves from the larger body of the working classes in order to wage a battle that they saw as uniquely theirs. As Stojanov told me “One has to be reasonable when making demands from the government. One can’t just ask for everyone.” On other words they were decidedly not speaking from the vantage point of

class but from that of the liminal abject, detached from social webs of mutuality and the wider moral community.

This conceptual frame both provided them with a unique moral advantage over the state and employers but also exposed them to the politically neutralizing effects of state bureaucracy. Markov and others ended up feeling betrayed by Stojanov and the movement in general. Once more the government had managed to split an already exhausted and beleaguered movement in half and demobilize most of its leadership. Stojanov himself had ended up on the lists of those receiving support and disappeared almost entirely from public life. In spite of the indignation shown by many members of the association the government had managed to score a considerable political victory. Stojanov personally took part in a number of media campaigns to celebrate the “joint victory” of the government and the veteran workers.

He was not short of self-praise when I spoke to him in his house in Shtip. “People can say what they want, but we managed to secure the subsistence of over two thousand people. No one else managed to do that. Not even the unions. They did nothing compared to us. Was I supposed to turn down the offer after all we went through? It was better for half of us to get something than all of us to get nothing. People will remember this. They’ll remember what we achieved all by ourselves.”

Back in the factory my co-workers were not too eager to eulogize the achievements of the *stechajci*. Some saw them as the archetype of the lazy loafer, parasitic on the state and unwilling to look for work. “I’ve never seen them come here looking for work. Not a single one of them” said one of my colleagues. Vanya, another colleague I befriended was similarly disenchanted with Stojanov. “The government just bought him off. Now he’s keeping his mouth shut and shooting campaign ads for them.”

It should perhaps be unsurprising that for many of the workers who remain stuck in the daily grind of underpaid assembly line work the relative successes of the *stechajci* appear to be of little value. After all their victory had little if any repercussions on the larger worker's movement as a whole. If they had once shared the same context of hardship and suffering and partook in the same collective recognition of the transgressive moment, now it appeared that the *stechajci* were no longer part of it. For the government and much of the public they became a problem solved, and for other workers a problem *sold*.

Intermittent appearances of “the plight of the *stechajci*” in the media can still be seen, but lack political force and are quick to fade away as “illegitimate”. By gradually sucking the association into ever more complex bureaucratic categories politicians had managed to transform and bracket what started off as a fluid and politically volatile social movement into a neatly taxonomized cohort which could then be simply ticked off the list. As media subjects they became symbolically ossified and no longer in a position to participate in the making of the context in which they appeared. In Austin's terms we might say that their language had been robbed of “performative force” and that it became “infelicitous” and out of context. Their claims on the “right to live” persist to this day and continue to performatively constitute their identity as moral individuals by stretching the “boundaries of [the imagined] community” (Zivi 2012: 90). But their case also exposes the limits of subjection and the tactics of resignification within a context that by definition involves multiple interlocutors occupying unequal positions of power.

6.7 Losing the State?

On other fronts employers have continued to be very successful in influencing policy discourses in a bid to involve the state into getting more workers in the factories. In 2010 Utrinski Vesnik interviewed a number of textile factory managers in Shtip who claimed that the main reason for the shortage of labour was the recent opening of the new university in the town which absorbed the vast majority of high-school graduates and so greatly reduced the working population of the town. The opening of the university had been part of the national strategy of extending tertiary education opportunities beyond the capital and raising the educational profile of the working population (Ministry of Education 2004). The strategy has come under heavy criticism from the local industrial business community in a familiar format. “We have plenty of vacancies ... but everyone wants a degree and a job in administration”, said one, while another complained that “there are 250 students in the faculty of philosophy and only twenty studying textiles. Are we going to live from philosophising or from production?” (Bojadziski 2010).

In stark contrast with events back in 2006, in 2011 the local mayor stood in unison with the owners of the five largest garment factories in the town made a joint statement that “an inaccurate picture has been created in the public about the working conditions in the garment industry ... and this has had an impact on the decision of many young people to avoid enrolling in the secondary school for textiles. Young people should know that the work in the garment factories is on a *European level*, in well-lit and spacious shop floors, with perfect cooling and heating systems and with the latest technology machines that are easy to handle ... and that wages are within the town’s average.” (Bojadziski 2011). It was once again reiterated that the opening of the university has had a negative effect on the economy.

The pressure seems to have had an effect and by 2013 the government announced that a portion of the latest World Bank loan will go towards developing the capacities of vocational secondary schools in response to the needs of the economy. The Ministry of Education announced the implementation of special programs to connect vocational schools with employers who will provide opportunities for practical experience (Utrinski Vesnik 2014). The President of the Parliament of the Business Chamber of Macedonia, Antoni Peshev, described this program as burdensome for the companies and instead suggested the state should subsidize companies for training workers at the cost of 500 Euros per worker. “If foreign investors have been promised cheap labour, and the latter is deficient or overvalued, then it is inevitable that we should start thinking about subsidies” (Tomikj 2014).

Peshev’s message to the government is quite clear: the market needs cheap, skilled labour in the form of welders, electricians, bricklayers, locksmiths and it is the state’s responsibility to produce such labour:

“I would like to issue a warning that the level of education and the size of income do not always go hand in hand. We can see that very well in our current situation. We have a deficit of workers with vocational skills, for which is offered high remuneration, opposed to an existing highly educated workforce that cannot find employment. Globalization, rising regional competition, new technologies and the development of the economy all point to a merciless conclusion. In the times that lie ahead there will be no room for the lazy, the unschooled and the privileged. Competition will be tougher not just here but in the whole world. This is why we have to invest all our efforts to have a strong, competitive young generation, ready to deal with the challenges of the economy” (ibid).

The state’s response came a few months later through the Minister of Education who urged parents to encourage their children to choose vocational secondary schools and

prepare graduates for immediate entry into the labour market. The current government of Gruevski has also accepted the practice of subsidizing training programs for new employees as a form of state support for new foreign investments in the country's Special Economic Zones (but not for domestic companies).

The outstanding feature of Peshev's comments is that he recognises, in an almost common sense way, that the "market" by itself does not generate the "right kind" of labour, in this case meaning cheap, skilled, flexible and willing. The latter is nothing but a promise that the state has given to both foreign and local investors that it must fulfil. It is implicitly stated that labour is not really a commodity whose value is determined by self-regulating markets but a social relationship that must be engineered by a concerted social effort involving all the available mechanisms of a state that is placed in the full service of international capital (see Polanyi 2001: 239). Peshev's is thus able to both reverently invoke the cruel realism of the market as the overarching determinant and the need for state intervention. His is certainly not an isolated occurrence and it is quite common practice for industrialists to both pressure governments for subsidies, whether for technological investments or training, and invoke self-regulating markets whenever they have to negotiate wages with workers. Market ideology here becomes selectively deployed as the handmaiden of new industrial interests, and rather than diminishing, the state has found new ways to increase its regulatory role (Polanyi 2001: 147).

These developments are certainly not limited to Macedonia and the transformation of the state as an agent mediating the relationship between markets and workers has been a trend in many European countries as the hallmark of market reforms. Such links certainly did exist during socialism but whereas the promise of the socialist state was employment, the neoliberal state promises employability (Bacevic 2014). But it has also been part of the strategy against the refusal of large numbers of potential wage-

labourers to participate in the capitalist economy on asocial terms by avoiding the ranks of assembly line workers. It has been an attack on the moral discourse of mutuality and the legitimacy of non-participation. With the *stechajci* out of the limelight, the unemployed have been even more firmly repositioned as “the lazy, the unskilled, and the privileged” for which there is no room in society, i.e. as “matter out of place”.

6.8 Concluding Remarks

In this section, I have outlined the larger context and some of the major transformations taking place in Macedonia by analysing concrete changes in the dominant economic ideology, the role of the state and the subjective remaking of “free” labour, especially the efforts made towards its greater commodification and “disembedding” to use Polanyi’s term. Indeed, as Parry (2005: 146) has noted, much of Polanyi’s masterwork, *The Great Transformation*, is a consistent analysis of institutional revolution in England that made labour a “free” commodity on the market. However, the picture emerging from my analysis is not a binary one, with uniform “market forces” at one end and “society” at the other, tugging in opposing directions. Nor can we speak of a moral economy of the dispossessed shaping political praxis along class lines. Such an image would not do justice to the multiplicity of actors, voices and ideologies as they come together in a specific social situation, in which they may invoke a variety of historical traditions or symbols and deploy them in often unpredictable ways.

Workers are clearly and quite consciously not only *not* acting as a class, but are also ambiguous about their relationship to the dominant. Their actions and strategies can be seen to operate through existing structures of power rather than outside of them, or in direct opposition to them (Rofel 1999: 32). Both the condition of operating “outside” of

webs of dependence or in “opposition” to them appears to hold little value for workers both practically and imaginatively. Whereas direct, and particularly class based, opposition is seen as futile or unworkable, individual autonomy is seen as the equivalent to ruthless exposure to the detrimental vagaries of free market capitalism. It is in the interstices of these two poles of power that strategies of dependence seeking are resorted to as a means of rearranging the operations of power in ways that allow workers to edge closer to their social, moral and economic needs. Such are the pleas to both the “social capitalist” and the “social state,” whether uttered by the skilled, the unwanted surplus, the aging, the young and the variously gendered.

Liminality and abjection are important concepts which I have used to show the subjective and symbolic ambiguity which workers were thrown into by the remaking of labour. The very process of remaking underscores the process of unmaking of previous social relations and of their corollary systems of signification and modes of personhood. The transition did not simply impose a new cosmological blueprint from above. It opened up existing categories and meanings that became the ground for competing moral discourses where ideologues of the self-regulating market are never alone. I have suggested that the language of criticism deployed by workers can be usefully analysed in its “performative” dimension, or as an attempt to create their own collective (moral) definition of the social context. Or, in Bourdieu’s language, to rattle the habitus and wrestle part of the symbolic power from the dominant who define the “rules of the game” (2005: 201).

But how successful was this strategy and what does it tell us about political agency? In summarizing Gramsci, Parry writes that “in order to win others to its view of the world, to its social, cultural and moral values” the working class cannot “triumph by confining itself to ‘corporate-economic’ struggles – to its own class interests. It must forge

alliances ... and patiently build up its own counter-hegemony” (Parry 2009: 176).

Similarly, Parry goes on, “Polanyi stresses that for a class to act as an effective historical agent it must stand for something more than its own interests. It must persuade other classes that it represents the interests of society” (ibid).

In many ways the various discourses of workers have tried to do precisely that. They have drawn upon the symbolic capital of kinship, the “moral society” and the “national community” in order to represent *their* struggles as part of a much larger whole. Dunn (2004: 133), describes a similar process in Poland where workers relied heavily on kinship metaphors in order to articulate such moral claims and thus re-contextualize labour relations in ways that are seen as more advantageous for workers. This is of course hardly new or limited to the context of post-socialism. For example, using kinship morality to challenge working class poverty and demand higher wages in the name of the family, resulted in the nineteenth century concept of the family wage (May 1982: 401). In the case of the *stechajci*, and in spite of the fact that they became the subject of political intrigue and manipulation, the very fact that they imposed upon the government the need to extend some kind of recognition for their status suggests that such strategies can produce change.

However we must not idealize such cosmologies as effective political platforms. Neither the government, nor the new capitalist elite have at any point been reduced to “the prisoners of the people”; or subdued by a “moral economy of the poor” (Thompson 1971: 79). Kinship or family morality can often be appropriated to serve as a mechanism for establishing effective control over the workforce and to reinforce forms of gender and age discrimination (May 1982: 418; also Narotzky 1997: 88). For example, appeals to employers that overtime labour does not allow working women sufficient time to “care for their children” may lead to a reduction in labour time spent

in the factory, but also reify the division of labour in the household to the detriment of women and their political role in society. Owners can often position themselves as protective patriarchs who “care” for their workers and the latter are often perceived as “little children” who often fail to comprehend processes designed “for their own good”. The kinship networks that are ubiquitously used in recruitment strategies by employers can create a docile workforce and circumnavigate the real difficulty of finding labourers for an industry encumbered by a reputation of economic cruelty (De Neve 2008: 218). In other words, overreliance on kinship metaphors often comes at the expense of narrowing the possibility of class based strategies and a failure to recognize a “common interest” for workers as a corporate group. Even though workers share a common refusal to become little more than labour commodities governed by market forces, they have not been united in *themselves* as “workers”.

As such they have not been entirely without results, as seen in the production of a reluctant labour force and the constant necessity of investing great efforts in maintaining a pool of available workers in conditions of severe unemployment. But the historical tide seems to be pulling in the direction of business interests as seen in the growing resolve of the state to stand firmly on the side of capital. The odds, today more than ever, appear stacked heavily against labour and their fight against commodification. It is this complex social situation that will be the object of further analysis in the following chapters, which explore the unfolding of some of the themes already introduced at the more intimate, ethnographic level: the lives of ordinary workers inside the garment factory. This will allow us to have a closer look at the technologies by which a non-consenting workforce is ushered in and managed on the assembly line.

Part IV: Life in the Factory

Chapter VII: Alienation and the Asocial Division of Labour

7.1 Introduction

In this section I will discuss through an ethnographic analysis the ways in which workers and management employ conflicting, if often overlapping, values and practices that shape work regimes in the factory, and more generally, the social experience of work. The conflicts that arise from these different views are mainly about imposing a certain understanding of the workplace, by defining what work ought to be about and what kinds of persons and social relationships are allowed to thrive and persist in the working environment. This chapter will explore the modes of control and discipline that take place on the shop floor, and more particularly the process of alienation and separation that is thereby established in the workplace and the development of new class distinctions in post-Yugoslav Macedonia. Such differences often become objectified in bodies as symbols of distinction and are performed daily in rituals of separation that play out along class lines. Class distinctions do not, however, automatically lead to class awareness in the strict political sense; instead, they often lead to a splitting of the social world into contradictory moral zones where workers negotiate relations with their peers and superiors according to a fluctuating set of rules. The moral value placed on horizontal ties of solidarity and mutuality between workers often gives way to individual strategies for establishing closer social ties with influential superiors (i.e. ties of dependence). Such strategies always carry the risk of translating vertical conflicts between workers and management into horizontal ones between workers, but can also score temporary advantages for workers.

These debates are certainly not new, nor peculiar to the Macedonian context. In his study of machine operators in Chicago, Illinois, Burawoy has famously argued that the

introduction of new production techniques and the promotion of individualism on the shop floor acted in ways that reduced worker-management conflicts, but exacerbated lateral antagonisms between workers instead (1979: 72). Key to this was the practice of “making out”, i.e. improvising with the available tools and materials, or forging tactical informal alliances with co-workers in order to increase outputs and individual wages (ibid: 57). The rules of the game of “making out”, Burawoy argues, are “experienced as a set of externally imposed relationships” that provide the “framework for evaluating the productive activities and the social relations that arise out of the organization of work” (ibid: 51). The shop floor culture arising from this practice inevitably leads to horizontal conflicts between workers (ibid: 65) and in addition structures their *consent* to the overall management policy of increasing production and surplus value.

The more controversial point made by Burawoy was that the consent thus generated was produced at the workplace rather than being imported from the outside (ibid: 135). He did not entirely dismiss outside factors, which may, for example, determine the position one comes to occupy within the relations of production. But the labour process does, in his view, enjoy *relative autonomy*, in that once workers enter the labour process it is the latter that determines what the effects of “imported consciousness” will be. In his analysis of the effects of race for example, he tries to show that even though racial prejudices persist on the shop floor and manifest themselves in the attitudes of workers, this does not affect production relations (ibid: 145). In other words, attitudes do not necessarily lead to activities. Burawoy keeps a neat distinction between the two in order to show that while external attitudes persist in the shop floor, activities within it are a result of the specifics of the internal labour process (see also De Neve 2008: 243).

In my own ethnographic material, I found this to be a difficult distinction to maintain. Few would disagree that discrepancies between what people say and think and what

they actually do abound in any social setting, and Shtip is here no exception. But as I hope to show in the pages that follow, the labour process in Stichko can in no way be disassociated from the larger spatio-temporal social context in which its activities are located. A good number of workers ‘consented’ to work in the factory only after exhausting other possibilities such as running their own business, pursuing a career through education, migration and even petty crime, all of which accumulated experiences that influence the specific way in which they not only “perceive” the working environment but the way in which they act in it. In addition, entry into the factory workforce is always channelled through relationship with friends or kin already employed in Stichko. These extra factory social relations play an important part in the subsequent positioning of workers in the labour process and their specific relationship to superiors and co-workers (see also De Neve 2001: 160; 2012: 13).

Additionally, the daily experience of work is haunted by memories and narrative reconstructions of socialism coupled with ‘expectations of modernity’, or narrative constructions of an imagined future (the latter usually embodied in the common signifier “The West”. I will say more on this point in the next chapter). I will argue that this directly impacts on the way in which workers in the factory articulate notions of personhood. As already suggested in the previous chapter, one of the main contests taking place in the factory revolves around the diverging understandings of personhood deployed by workers and management. Management tends to project a model of the workplace that operates as a small scale market society where free individuals exchange their possessions. For workers however, instead of free individuals freely exchanging commodities (properties) through an impersonal market, personhood extends into “the past and the future” and the person “is intelligible only as it is related to the external world and to other [persons]” (Taussig 2010: 37; Radin 1927: 273-274).

What all this points to, is that work is not experienced as the impersonal exchange of labour for cash mediated by the market, but as a set of socially embedded material practices that partake in the everyday construction of the moral cosmology of the self and its alignment to what work ought to be about. By investing their labour workers accumulate a shared awareness that firms are built by actual flesh and blood people and their labour, and that their ultimate value and purpose resides in providing these same people with a dignified means of subsistence (cf. Dunn 2004: 171). For the workers, life in the factory is not so much about producing things (although it certainly is that as well) but about producing people. Only in this sense can we discuss production as material, i.e. not ‘the actual factory minus the human element’ but, to use Rofel’s reading of Marx, the ‘social relationships that simultaneously produce and are produced by concrete activities’ (1999: 176). In fact, Dunn has argued this to be a particular property of socialist systems, where labouring was seen by people as investing an object with a part of themselves, thereby creating an ‘enduring property right to the product and an enduring relation to coproducers’ (2004: 128).

This has particular implications for the way in which we discuss the concept of *alienation*. Mauss took commodity exchange as the starting point for an understanding of alienation in industrialized society. For Mauss relations established via commodity exchange remain impersonal in the sense that the exchange of objects carries no notion of future or past relations between the transactors (Carrier 1995: 21). In contrast, gift exchange is personal in the sense that it establishes an enduring social relation between transactors which usually implies a culturally specific set of mutual obligations. The notion of gift here refers to anything from immaterial things to physical objects that is transacted as part of social rather than a purely monetary considerations (ibid: 19). Alienation is therefore a corollary phenomenon of the process of commoditization. In

the classical Marxist sense this would mean drawing a clear line between two creative spheres: the production of people in the household and the production of commodities in the workplace. Alienation occurs when the two circulate from one sphere to the other through the market which functions as a force of social amnesia. We therefore get the objectified consumption of people at the workplace (human labour power reduced to a commodity) and the personified consumption of commodities in the household (the products of labour acquiring properties and values of their own, see Graeber 2001: 79-80).

In his celebrated critique of work regimes in 20th century industrial capitalism, Braverman (1998) tried to outline the way in which the division of labour in the workplace contributes to experiences of alienation. More specifically, he investigated the rise of Taylorism and the concept of “scientific management” as applied to industrial production. The latter is a form of bureaucratic control that entails the careful division of production activities into a sequence of minute, measurable, observable and purely mechanical tasks as set and defined by management. It rests on the notion that the complex problems of modern production can be resolved with the aid of scientific methods (such as counting and measuring) that objectively determine the most efficient way of organizing production (see Braverman 1998: 59). To fit into this model, human labour itself must be reduced to purely mechanical operation and disassociated from the social totality of the person. In his analysis of the rise of “scientific management”, Braverman suggested that the main obstacle to establishing managerial control was that workers simply had superior knowledge of the production process and control over the tools of production (ibid: 69). Imposing managerial control therefore required precisely the kind of redirection of knowledge and expertise away from workers and towards management. The main result of this process of separation is the deskilling of shop floor

labour which increases its hierarchical dependence on “scientific” managerial guidance and alienates producers from each other and the objects produced (see also Carrier 1995: 51).

The self-managing firm was in many formal ways the very antithesis of Taylorism and its explicit goal was to reduce alienation. Even though management and technical directors (the experts) did usually have the final word in terms of how production was to be organized they could not bypass having to explain in detail any proposed changes to the workers councils, who could in theory oppose them. Their bigger problem however was the institutional protection of workers’ rights to employment and the ability of workers’ councils to influence wages. Factories were not merely places of work or the production of commodities – they were quite visibly and explicitly linked to other spheres such as political participation in society and the wellbeing of workers. A great number of workers lived and still reside in social housing constructed with funds from socially owned firms for workers and went on vacation in camps built and owned by these same firms. Work, life, leisure and politics all become visibly intermingled with producing things. This legacy still resonates strongly in the political imagination of workers that mediates the social experience of work and produces critical commentaries on what are acceptable practices in the workplace.

The ideology of the ‘market’ with all its underlying assumptions about human nature is far from absent on the shop floor, or in the wider Macedonian public discourse for that matter. As already argued, it is often strategically invoked as a socially neutral force of legitimation whenever politically controversial decisions are being made by management but is far from being accepted as the “natural” order of things. The production process, by and large, fails to “obscure” the manner in which surplus value is “secured” (see Burawoy 1985: 35). The power of market ideology does not derive

from its capacity to indoctrinate workers in the virtues of “self-regulation”, but in effectuating social distance between non equals, so as to limit and control the scope of mutual obligations between workers and management that otherwise might arise. As much as this interplay is structured by what goes on in the factory, it can hardly be said that workers’ “consciousness” becomes the product of its internal dynamics. Workers neither internalize the culture of individualism nor do they nurture ideals of class politics. Instead they seek to rearrange existing hierarchies in ways that may ameliorate some of the more deleterious effects of marketization. They do this by producing their own understandings of personhood and economic activity as embedded in a wider network of moral relations, a process shaped both inside and outside the factory (Dunn 2004).

In his analysis of capitalist forms of control, Burawoy rightly stresses that the question of discipline is not necessarily a one-dimensional product of de-skilling, which may or may not take place on the shop floor. Any workplace setting involves not only an economic dimension (the production of things), but also a political dimension (production of social relations) and an ideological one (the production of the *experience* of those relations), all of which are closely interrelated (1985: 39). I part ways with Burawoy however in his assertion that all three dimensions are “objective” in the sense that they are “independent of the particular agents of production”, that is, the people that come to work (ibid). Once more this assertion is predicated on the idea of the relative autonomy of the workplace and the capitalist mode of production. Power and control appear as purely reproductive, their task being to reconstitute the wider *relations of production* (relations of exploitation between classes) by operating on the *relations in production* (the technical division of labour). Insofar as workers come up with their own “ideological effects” these only become “the focal elements in the operation of capitalist

control” (ibid). Contrary to this, I hope to show that the control of labour in the factory, insofar as it exists, is always tenuous and never complete. It rests on multiple strategies and requires constant efforts to maintain at all three levels where it is ceaselessly challenged. In order to tease out this point we will need to focus more firmly on the social and cultural aspects of the workspace and the symbolic disconnection between workers and management in terms of how production is ideologically experienced and defined, and the specific ways in which inherited values and ideas from the past are deployed and reworked in new contexts. In what is to follow I hope to explore this tension in order to shed further light on the central theme of this thesis, i.e. the process of *remaking of labour*.

7.2 Introducing Stichko

By the time I started working in the factory in 2013, Stichko had been stitching garments for just over thirteen years. The company itself however had a longer history. It was started up in 1994 as a trading company by the current owner Mr Svemojski. During its first years of operation it acted as a broker, whose main activity consisted in seeking out and managing potential clients for Astibo’s male shirts production plant, and made its profits from provisions. Mr Samorich had joined the company during this period, briefly after getting his university degree in *Nothingtodowithgarments*. By 1997 however it became clear that Astibo was no longer able to meet its obligations to both its workforce and the buyers. “The trouble with Astibo” Mr Samorich explained, “was that they were unwilling to change and adapt to the times. So often we had problems with people in production, with quality and delivery, and they simply could not understand that the buyer has to come first.” Many workers however did not feel that

the primary role of the factory was to satisfy the whims of buyers, but the needs of producers. Unpaid or late wages would often result in spontaneous protests with workers refusing to finish shirts on time, let alone agree to overtime labour, which made the enterprise particularly ill prepared for the necessities of “just in time” production cycles that dominate global chains of garment production.

Faced with this reality, Stichko’s owner decided to open its own production line in 1999, and use the network of contacts he had built up through his work with Astibo to track down potential buyers. The main challenge then was not so much finding interested clients but establishing a reliable and controllable production line that would deliver on time. The trouble once again was finding skilled workers and Stichko faced the same issues already described by Danica in the previous chapter. With the town’s almost entire experienced workforce stubbornly clinging to Astibo, Stichko opened its first production line with about 150 mostly male trainees. They were drafted from the pool of unemployed labourers created by the wave of total economic decline that unfolded throughout the nineties. Many of these “veterans” are still employed in the factory; however, with the closing of Astibo, Stichko began to absorb the largely female skilled labour force that entered the labour market. As a result, today more than eighty percent of the roughly four hundred strong workforce in Stichko is female. The cutting section, where I worked, was an exception to this trend and employed around eighteen men and ten women of various ages and backgrounds including former Makedonka and Astibo employees.

Mr Samorich’s experiences in Astibo play a great part in his perception of what a garment producer ought to do in order to remain successful. He identified the main cause of Astibo’s decline in its “inability to change and adapt” and described it as “too big” and “not flexible enough.” In other words, he pictured Astibo as a non-manageable

workspace, with an impossible to control workforce that refused to submit to determinants of market logic and was therefore destined to collapse. In short, it was a labour force with the potential to defy and periodically escape managerial control. The organization of production in Stichko, under his managerial guidance, is intended to avoid precisely the kinds of problems that in his view ruined Astibo. Given the overall ideological re-categorisation of socialist practices as economic absurdities, the organization and management of Stichko has evolved in direct opposition to such conceptions. It is therefore heavily geared towards maintaining a clear separation of conception and execution, as well as fostering an ambience of precarious dependence on volatile markets. This means maintaining high levels of control over the workers, a task which, given the general reluctance by workers to internalize market models of personhood and social interaction, is never easy and always requires creative compromises.

In the sections to follow I shall investigate in more detail some of the main mechanisms of control and discipline deployed in the factory by management and analyse in turn the responses by workers. I will pay particular attention to the organization of the production process itself and the division of labour in the factory. I will deal with both of these in turn in order to tease out the effects of control and the extent to which such disciplinary practices can in fact prevent workers from shaping their own interests, identities and relationships on the shop floor. I suggest that the separation of conception and execution does not so much produce a deskilled workforce, but a cultural and moral separation between “downstairs” manual workers, and “upstairs” office workers or management, that allows the latter to assume control over the terms of interaction between workers and management.

7.3 Conceptualizing Production: Culture vs Nature

I spent my first three weeks in the factory in the upstairs planning office where eight clerks (seven women and two men) busied themselves with administering production. Mrs Peppa, the director of production (and second in command after Mr Samorich), also held a desk even though she spent virtually all of her time instilling discipline on the shop floor, especially the stitching section. Yana, a former English language teacher in her early thirties, acted as the communication officer and busied herself with transmitting information between foreign buyers, Mr Samorich and the shop floor foremen. Milica and Ana prepared the production plans they received from the buyers for use on the shop floor that included all the details for each type of garment. Once the trucks arrive at the warehouse with the materials and the CD with the order details, they are responsible for organizing all the stages of the production and providing all the necessary information for producing the order, such as what materials are to be used, what quantities, the design particularities etc. Their work also includes communicating with the partners and ordering additional materials for production and communicating with other departments and assembly line staff. They say their job is very stressful as they can only relax once the shirts have reached their destination and the buyers are satisfied with the results. Borka is in charge of quality control and, even though she has a desk in the office, spends most of her time on the shop floor inspecting garments at various stages of the stitching process (a task she shares with the two more quality control agents with offices in the factory but actually working for two of Stichko's most important foreign buyers).

Spaska was in charge of accounting the wages of workers in the stitching section and spent most of her time reading numbers from sheets and punching them in a computer. Tereza was in charge of setting the piece rate quotas and would spend a great deal of

time on the shop floor measuring worker's outputs with a stopwatch in order to set the "appropriate" quota for an eight hour working day and determine the piece rate value for each task. Marko and Filip were in charge of dealing with customs and transportation and had a particularly good insight into the goods coming in and out of the factory and consequently the profits made from production. The team would work together in presenting Mr Samoritch all the financial and technical details he would require to negotiate a deal with prospective buyers. The work of Tereza, Milica and Ana is particularly important in breaking down the various operations required to produce a specific garment and calculate the time and labour required to produce them. Based on this information Mr Samoritch can then proceed to negotiate a price and delivery date for any new orders.

We can easily discern from this brief expose that planning depends a great deal on the ability of management to fit labour into these initial calculations and minimize the capacity of workers to influence and define the planning model or skew the calculations. In other words, the conception of production needs to stand firmly above and beyond the execution of production. This philosophy is clearly reflected in the attitudes expressed by office workers towards manual labourers. In fact, one of the most recurrent themes that grabbed my attention during discussions with the office workers were the antinomies of "manual" and "intellectual" labour in the factory. On one occasion I asked Tereza to compare office work with shop floor work in terms of difficulty. She said "It is ungrateful to make any judgement on these things. You have to do a job to know best how difficult it is. But I think that working on the shop floor is less stressful. You can just focus on one thing and you don't have to think about anything else and you can just wait for the time to pass. The responsibility is much higher in the office and your work depends on information you receive from others." On

another occasion, Milica also suggested that shop-floor workers are different because they “don’t have to think about anything. You know I read somewhere that people with low education are better equipped for manual work because they mind doesn’t wander and they are more focused. They don’t have anything to think about so they can just do the work!”

This idea that shop floor labour requires less mental effort and is therefore “easy” and as opposed to office work was of course a caricature that failed to capture the actual reality of either. To begin with the obvious, the question of whether or not one has acquired a university degree has absolutely no bearing on one’s capacity to engage in creative thought. In fact, as Graeber has noted, in many hierarchical systems, the burden of what he terms “imaginative labour” more often than not falls on the back of the disempowered who have to spend a great deal of time trying to understand what exactly is expected of them by the dominant (2012: 51). Secondly, even though certain individual tasks on the shop floor require a relatively brief period of learning before they could be performed, becoming a proficient and experienced worker requires a great deal more (in addition to being physically taxing). It involves a long period of learning (certainly longer than the nine months I spent on the shop floor) in order to grasp the process of production and the delegation of responsibilities in their entirety. One must also develop the techniques and dexterity to perform a wide variety of tasks, since the majority of workers are almost never entirely committed to the performance of one task in the line only. Conversely, the work done in the office is not necessarily “mental”. Much of it is pretty mechanical and repetitive and consists of little more than long hours of copy-pasting and data entry (see also, Freeman 2000: 229).

Such utterances are not without their effects, however, even though they are, strictly speaking, false representations of reality. They legitimize the separation of conception from execution by framing both within a hierarchy of value, in which the “mental” can look down upon the “physical”. In the process of planning, shop-floor workers are robbed of sociality and reduced to a sheer physicality that can take its place alongside all the other material aspects of production that require organization. In other words, shop floor workers are being actively construed as “things” to be managed, or as the raw materials of nature being shaped and dominated by culture (Ortner 1996: 25). This is hardly surprising, given that office workers spend most of their day interacting with shop floor workers through data-sheets where the latter appear in a partial form as labour-tasks with numerical values.

There is also a cultural separation being introduced that sees manual workers as “different sorts of people” from office workers that need to be kept apart from the latter (Carrier 1995: 50). Oftentimes, manual workers were viewed as a source of pollution. For example, when Spaska developed herpes on her lower lip, she insisted that she probably contracted it from handling the pay sheets of shop floor workers all day long. “Who knows who has been touching those papers” said Spaska as the other women grimaced in disgust. It is, of course, pointless to look for the medical rationale behind this assertion; its effects on reality operate through the symbolic. As Ortner notes (1996: 26), drawing on Douglas (1996), pollution usually partakes of the natural, and left to its own devices always threatens “contagion”—hence, disorder--which in turn only further increases the imperative to control it and reintroduce order.

On other occasions, office workers would stress differences in dress, tastes or mannerisms between themselves and shop-floor workers. Such commentaries are meant

to reify their own perceived identities as “middle class” by projecting onto manual workers certain elements that stand in opposition to middle-classness, such as shabby clothing or hygiene deficiency (Dunn 2004: 92; Said 1979). We might therefore say, *pace* Bourdieu, that class is here not reducible to the economic (office workers in the factory earn on average the same amount as shop-floor workers), but always requires a certain level of embodied cultural capital as a marker of distinction (see Freeman 2000: 52).

In turn this also produces a moral separation as seen for example in the refusal of office workers to identify with complaints made by shop-floor workers. Yana for example made this amply clear one day in the office. She had gone down to the packing section to check on progress and came back saying “I can’t listen to Vera complaining anymore about how she has to stay long hours to finish the work. If she thinks that counting shirts and stuffing them in a box is a difficult task she should go ask Mr Samorich for a raise so I don’t have to listen to her anymore.” On another occasion we were discussing complaints by shop floor workers who did not appreciate occasionally having to come to work on Saturdays. Ana found no reason for complaints since according to her they earned extra money for it and the work involved “only physical exhaustion. You just stand there all day long and move the iron left and right.” If complaints are meant to evoke a sense of moral community for the listener by creating empathy (Peteet 1994: 32), they seemed to be falling short of achieving that end. For office workers alienation means recognizing manual workers not in their totality social persons, but in a limited aspect that focuses only on one of their alienable properties, i.e. their (manual) labour. Insofar as giving it up has been duly compensated by a wage, there are no other morally legitimate grounds for complaint. In other words, office workers project onto shop floor

workers the normative image of the possessive individual. This however, as will become apparent, does more to shape the attitudes and perceptions of office workers themselves than the actual way in which shop floor workers experience and conceptualize themselves.

7.4 Spatial Organization and the Control of Bodies

This organizational division of labour is reflected in the actual organization of the factory's physical space as a kind of panopticon. Mr Samorich's office is strategically positioned on the second floor of the office building adjacent to the shop floor with a large tinted window looking straight down on to the cutting section and beyond to the stitching brigades. The tinted glass allows for a clear view of the shop floor from the office but from the opposite direction one can only just about make out the silhouette of someone standing behind the glass, though it is impossible to make out who the person is exactly and in which direction is their gaze employed. Power is here both "visible and unverifiable" (Foucault 1995: 201), in the sense that workers can at all times see the tall structure from where they can be observed, without knowing whether or not they really are being observed at any point in time. To the right are two more clear windows. One is from the small kitchen and another from the meeting room from where the various clients and business partners that visit the factory can see the production line in full display.

The shop floor is a large single shared space housing all the different sections of production (the warehouse, embroidery and printing room are separate enclosed spaces on the same level). It has a hangar-like appearance with its twenty meter high ceiling,

from which various metal structures hang and support the lighting, electricity cables and air-conditioning tubes. The surrounding walls and parts of the hanging metal construction also support an increasing number of video cameras used for surveillance. They transmit the image directly to Mr Samorich's computer screen in his office. On occasion, the cameras can be relied on to thwart workers' effort to skew the piece rate quotas. I witnessed one such event when Mr Samorich came to the office to consult Tereza about the quotas. Tereza complained that one of the seamstresses was acting out. "Every time I go to time her she slows down." Mr Samorich's solution was to move the cameras so that she could be observed without her knowledge, and then do a comparison with Tereza's measurements from the shop floor. It is hard to determine how often this particular technique was used by management to set the quotas, but it is safe to say that Mr Samorich was unhesitant in pursuing this strategy. And after all, the cameras are there to help exercise control over the production process.

On the shop floor, the video cameras did contribute to the overall sentiment that one is being observed, even though they were somewhat superfluous since the cutting section was located just under Mr Samorich's office, fully exposed to his ominous gaze; moreover, Mr. Zeko, the cutting section foreman, was constantly roaming the tables. The open plan floor also allowed for other senior management figures like Mrs. Peppa, who usually spent her time in the stitching section, to observe from a safe distance what workers were doing. All this adds to the constant pressure on workers to be continually aware of their movements and behaviour during the working day and the awareness that they are never alone. At first glance, there certainly is a sense in which constant surveillance as a technique for disciplining results in self-regulation and the normalization of relations of power. Moreover, as Kelly-Fernandez encountered whilst

conducting her own research in a garment factory in northern Mexico, the interconnectedness of tasks across the shop floor further contributes to the self-regulation workers impose on themselves (1983: 127-8). There is a certain awareness that the person next to you depends on the quality of your work in order to meet their piece rate quotas, and few workers are indifferent to this responsibility.

The acceptable and unacceptable bodily movements and gestures during working hours are also explicitly defined by management in relation to individual productivity and efficiency. Workers are expected to look only at the piece of cloth they are handling and not at the other workers or their surroundings. Laughing and chatting are strictly prohibited during work. All the more so with forms of gesticulation that reveal one might be so engaged in narrating a story to other workers that mere words do not suffice to capture the experience. A worker is then in great danger of revealing a lack of focus and concentration, but more importantly, that her hands are in the wrong place. A mistake might be made, a wrong cut, a moment of weakness and a whole pile of parts can be ruined for which no spare materials are available. Even if spare materials are available, the long procedure of accounting for the loss of fabric, getting a new roll approved from the warehouse and having it delivered can result in considerable delay. To avoid this, an intense battle over the control of bodies takes place on a daily level on the shop floor. And the focus is precisely on bodies, on the actual physical dimension of performing work. The nature of manual labour is, as I already argued, perceived by management and the office workers in general to be strictly mechanical and to require no thought beyond that of coordinating the body through a set of physical motions necessary for cutting, stitching, ironing and packing fabric. It is precisely this

philosophy that allows the body to be gazed upon as something to be regulated, controlled and subdued.

Periods of work scarcity were moments when discipline got a little lax. I took the fact that there was simply next to no work to be done as an opportunity to engage in banter with the other workers, as well as ask some extra questions. The results were not always benign, as I learned on one occasion whilst having an engaging--too engaging--conversation with Prasho whilst trimming cuffs together, only to be abruptly interrupted by a screaming Mr Zeko coming from right behind us:

“Prasho I don’t wanna hear another word from you. Don’t let me see you open your mouth! Mrs Peppa saw you from the other end waiving your scissors and explaining something to Aleksandar. I don’t want to get calls from her saying that you’re all chatting here instead of working. (Turns around and shouts to everyone) I don’t want to waste my time and interrupt my work because of all of you! I’ve had enough of this! Stop talking and get to work! And be very careful what you do from now on because you all know we have more workers than we need! Don’t give Mrs Peppa any ideas!”

This episode demonstrated that even in cases where chatting did *not* necessarily affect overall productivity (i.e. there was very little work to be done to begin with), discipline still had to be enforced and sociality repressed. Everyone immediately went quiet and tried to appear fully concentrated at the task at hand. Prasho was sent off to clean threads in the stitching section. Later on Grigoriy contrasted this incident with how things worked when the worker’s councils still existed: “Back in the day if someone started shouting like that you would just look at him and say 'Shut up you! Where do you think you are?' Haha. Imagine that. Imagine Mr Samorich coming down here to

scream and someone telling him 'Shut up you! This isn't your daddy's factory!'" No reminders were needed though that things were now decidedly different and workers no longer have a say.

I should also point out Mr Zeko's emphasis on Prasho's uncontrolled bodily movements (waving the scissors). Management finds this particularly threatening on the assembly line where machine like coordination is the desired ideal. "Look at this" Mr Samoritch, once told me in his office, pointing a garment technology magazine he had picked up at a fair in Germany. The page contained a pie-chart of supposed productivity rates. "Of the eight hours workers spend here no less than forty percent of the time is lost on passing items from one line to the next. This is a timed objective study. And they've invented this system of suspended hooks going over the workers heads where they can hang the garment and it will be automatically transported to the next production line saving all of that time. Imagine how much we would gain in productivity?" Paul Valery's remark that "modern man (sic) no longer works at what cannot be abbreviated" (Taussig 2004: 44) acquires a degree of truth here, in the sense that the actual production of goods in the factory is rarely separated from the production of greater "efficiency" and the pursuit of new ways for extracting an "ever-greater surplus from the labour process" (Cross 2010: 362). Timing, measuring and controlling the bodies of workers becomes the sine qua non of the rational, productive and efficient deployment of labour. It is here that the latter becomes a detachable commodity and a replacement for the social person. Laughter, chatting and gesticulation are all in direct collision with this model of the worker - an affront to the efforts of controlling bodily movements. It is also, an affront to the idea of the worker as "possessive individual", with labour as "their" alienable property.

The second important point to be highlighted here is the explicit reminder of workers' precarious position in the factory ("We have more workers than we need"). The disciplining practices of management here are not so much designed to normalize the situation and produce a consenting workforce but precisely the opposite: create and maintain an ambience of abnormality, precariousness, and instability as a means of fragmenting dissent and enclosing it within the privatized interior of the individual (Taussig 1990: 219). This is done through constant reminders that the industry is not doing so well, the frequent termination of contracts for employees, the stops and gaps in production, the volatility of global markets and the lack of an effective welfare safety net, all of which contribute to an overwhelming atmosphere that 'everything hangs by a thread'¹³. The way the experience of precarity reverberates across workers in the cutting section can easily be discerned from their commentaries. Following the shouting incident, I said to Mitko that it was unfair to send Prasho away like that. He agreed and said: "He's been shuffled around too often for the past two years that he's been working here. It doesn't look good. On top of everything the industry is not doing too well. Factories are sending workers on holidays because there's no work. Even here *we've got more people than we need.*"

7.5 Commoditizing Labour

The disciplining principles of precarity are also reflected in the valuation of labour.

Whereas the office workers are paid a fixed salary of roughly 200 euros a month, shop floor workers are subject to wildly complicated piece rate regimes designed to increase

¹³ Most workers are hired on temporary contracts that are usually renewed (or not) every three months. Legally, an employer is not obliged to offer an employee a permanent contract for the first five years (see Saveski 2010).

their productivity. Article 37 from the Collective Agreement for the Garment Industry between the Union of Syndicates of Macedonia and the Union of Employers, does state that “in the case that 50% of the workers are achieving less than 70% of the quota the syndicate can make an initiative for its reevaluation.” However, considering that the Union has absolutely no presence in the factories it is difficult to see how this “initiative” can be made, notwithstanding the fact that the regulations in article 37 are already hardly favorable to workers. Consequently, owners and managers are at liberty to arbitrarily set the piece rate quotas without consulting any form of organized labour.

As such, the quotas are subject to frequent fluctuations, although for Mr Samorich they reflect objective measurements of individual value. The stitching section is a particular case in point. In a month with regular orders, meeting the daily quota alone will secure an average of 200-220 Euros. The precise number of sleeves or collars one will have to stitch can vary depending on management decision. Absenteeism is not compensated for by the factory. If workers are away on sick leave, the factory is obliged to give out only the minimum wage as agreed in the collective agreement with workers in the garment industry, which in 2013 stood at roughly 90EUR¹⁴. Workers are allowed, when orders are high, to work overtime. And there is a twist. For the first three days of overtime workers are paid the standard rate per each extra piece they stitch. After three days of continuous overtime however they start to receive a 50 percent bonus on each piece they stitch during overtime hours. If for example a worker does two straight days

¹⁴ Even though a minimum wage of 8,050 Denars [EUR130] was introduced in January 2012, it came with special exemptions for the garment, textile, leather and shoemaking industries who were meant to adapt to the new changes gradually and fully implement the minimum wage by 2015. In January 2014, the still in power conservative IMRO-DPMNU raised the limit to 10,080 Denars, again to be fully implemented in the abovementioned industries by 2018. Given that the current average wages in Shtip’s larger factories already match, and often slightly exceed this amount, and taking into account the steady annual rates of inflation, the raising of the minimum wage will have very little effect on the town’s industrial population and is nothing short of political marketeering.

of overtime and a regular shift on the third day she will lose her right to the bonus. The result is an explosion of income differences in the stitching brigades. Women who have to juggle garment work with household responsibilities are particularly at a disadvantage and end up earning less than the men. On one monthly income sheet I noted a lowest salary of EUR90 and the highest of nearly EUR1000, for which the worker in question had to put in almost two and a half months' worth of working hours into one month.

There was in fact much talk about this particular worker whom I will call Bojan. He was a young married man and in the habit of pulling off two full shifts a day, six days a week whilst keeping his good spirits about him. For office workers he was proof that one could indeed earn good money on the shop floor. Such comments were made on the assumption that in theory, everyone could pretty much do the same, which was strictly speaking untrue as there is simply not enough work available throughout the year for everyone to follow the same pattern. But even if there was, few workers would find the idea worth considering. In the cutting section, Bojan was seen as slightly mad and "possessed by money". "There'll be nothing of him left in a few years. He'll wither out", said Mandana, a former Astibo employee. The young women questioned his ability to be a good husband. "So what if he earns all that money if I have to look for someone else to sleep with because he's too tired or never there." For most workers, earning large sums of money is, in and of itself, of little value if in the process one becomes separated from the webs of mutuality that constitute the moral person. Ignoring these is not only immoral but provokes immoral behaviour in others, such as infidelity. This has a direct effect on how workers perceive the piece rate quotas.

The cutting section itself has only recently been subjected to a piece rate regime; workers were previously receiving a fixed salary. The change happened after workers organized a minor “strike”, or a stoppage in production, and demanded to negotiate with management for higher wages. The confrontation happened before I joined the factory. I could therefore only get a reconstruction of events from different people in the cutting section. Their accounts were more or less similar. Workers had initially gathered in the canteen and demanded to speak to Mr Samoritch. They explained to him their demands for higher wages and Samoritch explained that there was no money for such things. Making a direct reference to Astibo he reiterated that factories that arbitrarily raise wages quickly become bankrupt and made it clear to workers that they are “free” to leave the factory if they are unhappy with the conditions. The confrontation ended with a promise from Mr Samoritch to make some changes and to continue with talks and consultations. The changes, however, were not necessarily what workers were hoping for and Mr Samorich saw the problem in an entirely different light. From his point of view, workers resembled a bunch of boisterous adolescents who had to be “disciplined and reformed through carefully supervised labour” (Graeber 2007: 41):

“Their demands are not reasonable. They are like little children when they come up here to complain. But we made many changes in the cutting section as a result of those discussions and things have improved a lot. They were far worse off before and had worse valuing. They didn’t have quotas and they did not have a sense of how much they’re worth individually. And we had a situation where those who were hard working were valued as much as the lazy ones. And then the hard workers became lazy as well. And there was discontent, so we spoke to all of them. Now the interesting thing is that they did not see the solution in having a healthy competition, so we can see how much everyone is worth. Instead all they wanted was ‘give us more money’. Let us work the

same way, leave everything the same just give us more money. So we had plenty of discussions, first they all came up, then we spoke individually, then in groups: you know, the cutters, then the layering workers etc. And the end result was that we changed the system of valuation. Before, regardless of how much they worked, they got paid the same. So what I wanted to do was avoid subjective evaluation of the workers. No matter who the person is, no matter how skilled they are, you can never have a correct opinion of how much they're worth. Some people can leave a very good impression. You know we usually react to these impressions and some people can [fool you] into thinking that they're God knows who. It's best if the evaluation is *objective and based on some measurable indices*. I want to eliminate subjective evaluations. Whoever it is, they can't get away from work. And that's what we have achieved. We know how much work each worker has done. And now, I think, they have far fewer conflicts and disagreements down there."

I mentioned that a lot of the workers feel that not everyone is being treated equally as a result of these changes but this did not offset Mr Samoritch who expanded on his philosophy of work:

"Not everyone should be equal and not everyone is equal. Even the fingers on one hand are not equal. The world is made to be different, with many variations and that is its beauty. What we need to ensure is that everyone has the same conditions, an equal starting line. We cannot treat everyone equally but we need to make sure everyone gets an equal chance and an equal starting line. What are all those races about and all those competition? If everyone should be equal then let us [Macedonians] be equal with the USA. What are the Olympic Games about? People want to compete to prove to one another who is better. But there are rules. If you respect the rules and do better by playing

by the rules then you really are better. Here's your start line and start racing. If you're fast, you'll get there first. If you're no good you'll be the last."

This final statement is a standard glorification of the rationality of neoliberal capitalism ("equal opportunity") that could have easily rolled off the pen of a Milton Friedman (as it often in fact did; see Friedman 1962: 107; 1980: 128). The question that is not asked is, of course, who defines the rules of the game? For Mr Samoritch, the rules are the *doxa* of rational economic behaviour. They are presented as an external set of objective economic truths that must be dispassionately applied and cannot be questioned. For people in the cutting section however, the rules appear as a set of arbitrary measures that correspond to nothing more than the arbitrary whims of management. To begin with, all important decisions regarding the worth of individual tasks, the actual distribution of work, and the position of a worker within the process of production, ultimately reside in the hands of management - a reality the workers are distinctly aware of. As Mitko told me: "How can they decide that layering should be paid less than the design work? Do you know how exhausting it is to do that job? You have to stand all day long and drag those sheets to a point where your legs are giving up on you. But they've decided that it's worth less. How can they decide that when they've never tried doing these tasks."

The second problem, as workers saw it, was the distribution of work. Contrary to Beynon's experience in Ford in the late sixties, production in Shtip does not require a "good continuous effort" to meet a "reasonable workload" and produce the number of shirts that management knows can be produced (2009: 133). Unlike Ford, production in garment factories in Shtip is simply never "continuous". The workload increases and decreases according to seasonal variations and producers are entirely dependent on direct orders from European buyers. Periods of intense activity are followed up by

idleness when workers struggle to find something to occupy themselves with. Usually the third table on which I spent most of my time was considered an auxiliary table by Mr Zeko and in times of work scarcity we would receive very little work when compared to the other two. Allocating work was, in other words, very clearly a matter of human politics instead of an “objective” or disinterested allocation of resources.

7.5.1 Socializing Labour

Mechev for example, who was regularly earning the highest paycheck of all the power cutters, made no secret of the fact that the owner was a very close friend of his first cousin, and that he could always “make a call” if he had any problems. Consequently his high wages were always discussed as stemming from his privileged relationship to management, not from his work ethic and individual productive capacity. “Of course he makes more money when they give more work on his table. I’d like to see him make more money on Zhare’s table” Mitko told me. It was generally agreed that if Mechev, or anyone for that matter, received more money, this reflected a specific *social relationship* and had nothing to do with individual merit. In other words, differences in personal income were seen by workers as variations in degrees of social proximity with those in power, whom they in turn held responsible for ensuring a “fair” distribution of profits. The obvious problem this caused was that there was no way to unambiguously determine the fair price of a social relation. Consequently, there was no way it could be squarely compensated, which creates a situation of permanent mutual indebtedness. For workers this implies mutual obligations, and, the right to make claims on their superiors.

It is important to highlight that this attitude is not just produced in the factory, but corresponds to the way workers perceive the wider organization of society and the social (mutual) obligations between dominated and dominant, which is to say by an external “moral economy”. In addition such attitudes also influence the way in which workers “act” on the shop floor. For example, the managerial insistence on establishing measurable indices that determine the individual “worth” of employees failed to produce the requisite culture of competitiveness or “making out” among workers. This is best seen in periods of severe work scarcity when one might expect precisely an increase in competitive behaviour over decreasing resources. Instead, workers would offer “gifts” to each other, such as the odd pile of cuffs which they would trim at a greatly reduced pace. This allows them to “look busy” and thus avoid reprisals from management for appearing idle. Some workers would start layering pieces only to mess them up whenever a safe moment so allowed and start all over again until the end of the shift.

But perhaps a more telling indicator was the refusal displayed by many workers to heed Mr Zeko’s advice to write down all the work that they did (that was not preassigned), if they wished to get paid for it. The few workers who did diligently write down everything they touched, such as Kirkov and Mechev, were dismissed as petty misers. As if their claiming payments for the actual work they had done represented some kind of obscene transgression. Mechev in particular was meticulous in calculating every Denar earned and would often frequent the wage accountant’s office to double check if their calculations squared. He was also the only one to openly brag about his monthly earnings whereas most people preferred sharing the information on their payslips only

with their closest friends. I asked Mitko why wasn't he doing the same thing and his reply was to dismiss Mechev as being "pathologically obsessed with money".

This reference to pathology is not accidental, for in a sense, self-auditing and keeping accounts did constitute a moral abnormality. Such behaviour is seen as dishonourable and evokes negative images of petty miserliness. In contrast, honour is usually associated with open handed generosity. Additionally, self-auditing threatens to reduce the relationship between workers and employers to an exchange of labour for cash. It implies a recognition that once the "goods" have changed hands all accounts have been squared and there are no withstanding mutual obligations (see Graeber 2011b: 92-94). In short, it terminates the social relation, and the workers would have none of that. Refusing to self-audit was in a very real way an attempt to create mutual obligations based on mutual indebtedness, i.e. to transform an empty asocial form of inequality into something thicker and more social (and perhaps, generous).

Ruzha and Jasna also made explicit their reluctance to audit themselves throughout the month, and saw the whole exercise as a pointless waste of time. They even made a monthly ritual that expressed their refusal to submit to "objective" valuation. As soon as they could see Mr Zeko distributing the monthly payslips, they would both write down a certain amount on a piece of paper and then exchange the papers. The point was to try to guess the amount contained in the payslip, and then see whose guess was closer to target. The question was never "how much do you think we earned?" but "how much do you think he'll give us?" In other words what the Ruzha and Jasna were evaluating was not their individual productivity but their relationship to Mr Zeko for that month. A low amount would mean they've fallen out of favour with him and that they need to improve

their social standing, rather than their skills and productivity. Kocho for example refused to audit himself in order to maintain a thicker relationship with Mr Zeko that would allow for his social needs to be recognized. More specifically, he considered himself a “young person” and told me that sometimes he likes to “have a drink on the weekend” and maybe not show up for work on Monday. “So I don’t write things down and Zeko will turn a blind eye when I miss a day of work.” In short, Kocho treated his labour in the factory as part commodity and part gift exchange. He would “offer” part of his labour as an uncalculable gift and thereby maintain a delicate web of obligations with his immediate superior (Graeber 2011b: 122).

7.6 Management and the Problem of Skill

The attitudes of management towards workers on the shop floor are not so much concerned with deskilling as with reminding them that they have no skills to lose to begin with, which is to say they are perfectly and totally expendable. I was an uncomfortable party to one such occasion during my very first week on the shop floor when Mrs. Peppa, the technical manager, approached me out of curiosity regarding my ‘descent’ from the office into the cutting section. Everyone else immediately went very quiet as soon as she arrived and became focused on their work. I was in the middle of trimming a pile of cuffs and was not too happy to be singled out by a friendly conversation with management.

"So you're down here now? Are you done with the office work?" she asked me. "Yes" I replied, "time to see what goes on in this part." Her reply was "not much", as I could apparently see for myself. She went on to describe herself as a qualified biochemist who only reluctantly joined the factory after failing to find work in her field. She continued:

“This work you know, textiles (sic) it’s nothing special. It’s a bit of a no brainer, I mean you would need a few days to be proficient in most of the tasks here. You don’t need to use your brain most of the time. This is a notch over agricultural work.” I felt a bit embarrassed as she was making those statements in front of the other workers and tried to make a point that you do need to concentrate a lot, and *know* what you are doing, but also, that I would not be able to do the work without supervision. This, she assured me, was not the case and as a “fellow intellectual” I would soon realize she was right. I never quite came to agree, but what I did realize was that the point of making such statements in front of workers was not to accurately describe the nature of shop floor labour, but to accentuate the hierarchical separation of conception from execution and define management and manual workers as different sorts of people. It was a kind of “symbolic violence” that tried to impose upon workers a sense of their own devalued cultural resources and social limits (Sancho 2012: 7; Schwartz 1997: 89).

For all their experience and dexterity, shop floor workers are never consulted on matters related to improving the efficiency of production. This can be seen in production problems that arise in the cutting section from having to work with poor quality fabric. If the fabric has a chequered pattern things can get particularly messy. Once layered, the pile of fabric is handed over to the bandsaw cutters who can follow the printed pattern on top and cut all the layers at one go. For this to work however the layers need to be piled up in such a way so that all the parts come out looking the same, which is easy enough to do when using plain coloured fabric, but extremely tricky when using poor quality chequered fabric which requires a certain technique. This is usually done by using special pins that are fixed on the table in an erect position, and then layering the fabric on top of them so they can keep it in place. Each layer has to be pinned down so

that the chequered pattern matches the one beneath it. In the case of yokes or cuffs, the finished parts must also be symmetrical which makes the task even trickier. When the materials are stretched or just poor quality the squares simply do not match and the materials have to be tampered with as they are being layered. This usually involves stretching them additionally before being pinned or picking a different crosspoint for some layers. It is by definition a matter of creative improvisation that one gets better at with prolonged handling of different types of fabric (see also Cross 2011: 131). But no matter how skilled, if the quality of the fabric is too poor there is very little to be done.

Once the pile is arranged it is handed over to the cutters on the bandsaw who need to be very careful not to unsettle the pile while cutting it which may result in the pieces being cut unsymmetrically. If this happens the parts in question are rendered useless and a team of people need to get involved in finding additional material, creating the paperwork, reprinting the pattern, layering the fabric, rough cutting it and layering it using the pins once more. The shirts lacking the parts remain incomplete and the seamstresses or seamsters assigned to stitching that particular part may not reach their quotas for the day. I noted precisely one such occasion where a serious problem in production arose from pieces being cut unsymmetrically. They were part of an order that I, among others had been working on for a few days. As usual Mr Samoritch came down to inspect the problem and find a solution. He, Mr Zeko and one of quality controllers hovered over Badev as he was doing the cutting and discussing the process between them. Badev remained silent throughout. After a certain amount of deliberation Mr Zeko approached our table and asked if there are any more finished piles ready for the bandsaw. I quickly wrapped mine up and handed it over. After some joint inspection, it was given to Badev to cut who had to operate the bandsaw with the entire management team observing him. Once cut, the team reassembled to examine the

pieces. As we were looking at them Jasna commented with a soft voice: “What are they talking about there? Look at them they seem as if they’re inventing a rocket. How did they become the experts all of a sudden. Isn’t cutting the pieces our job?” As far as management was concerned cutting and layering was Jasna’s job, but figuring out how to best do it, was certainly not.

After a second round of examination Mr Samoritch asked for a third pile of yokes. He then told Badev that most likely the pieces get a little unsettled when he is moving them on the bandsaw. He should start cutting them more slowly, take greater care and avoid pressing the pile too much against the bandsaw. How they arrived at this conclusion no one was certain, least of all Badev, who only commented with a dose of sarcasm “I guess they found the problem in my cutting.” The possibility that the yokes were not symmetrical because of the simple reason that the fabric was of poor quality did not surface, and in any case, it may have been due to my poor layering. This could not be fully verified without unsettling the entire pile and removing the pins which the examination committee obviously did not do. Only later did I find out from the office workers that the same day they had contacted the buyers and shown them sample pictures, explaining that there were difficulties in production due to the poor quality of the materials they had sent. This information, however, was not shared with workers nor were they allowed to assess the quality of the fabric or participate in identifying the problem in any way.

Back on the shop floor Badev was only too happy to cut the rest of the pieces slowly and go back to his usual routine. “I know how to do my job. I don’t know why Samoritch had to come down for this” was his comment in the aftermath. Tome, one of the senior workers in the cutting section frequently complained to me about the fact that the management do not listen to the workers and that they do not value their opinion. He

thought that it was owed to pure arrogance and a conviction that they know best.

“Maybe they do for some larger things but we’re the ones who know the little details.”

A similar event took place a few months later when we again had the same problem with layering some poor quality chequered fabric. Mr Samoritch once again descended to the shop floor to see what the problem was. Given that this was a problematic and time consuming fabric, management had thought it necessary to devise a time saving strategy. Jasna and Ruzha had been trying in vain to tell Mr Zeko that they will have to do it the standard way but were only told to give him advice when he asks for it and to get back to work. When Mr. Samoritch arrived the very possibility of even trying to share their opinion vanished. After some quick consultations with Mr Zeko, Mr Samoritch decided that the best thing we can do to save time is to layer one pile for each size, cut it in two symmetrical parts and then flip one part on top of the other to make one thicker pile. The bandsaw cutters would then cut two piles in one go and we would improve our efficiency by 50%. Having heard the plan I gathered the courage to intervene:

Me: We already thought of that but the problem was that when flipping the pieces on top they get slightly unsettled and don’t match the ones underneath and then we had to waste even more time to rearrange them from scratch.

Mr Samoritch: It will work. Just take these two clips (hands them to Mr Zeko) and fix both ends so the pieces stay in place and flip them over. Ok get to work.

After he left I tried using the clips only to find out that they made very little difference. They were bulky and inefficient as they only fixed the pile in the middle and I ended up with the same result when flipping it over. I told Mr Zeko that this will simply not work

but he came up with the idea to place some cardboard over the pile and fix it using the clips to keep the pile steady and then flip it over and once positioned just pull out the cardboard from underneath and voila! We shall have our pile! This also did not work as the cardboard blocked our view of the pile underneath and we could not match the pattern. Moreover, since the fabric was sticky extracting the cardboard was impossible without again unsettling the pieces. Nonetheless, Mr Zeko set out to get someone to cut him some cardboard that would match the shape of the pieces so that it didn't block the view of the pile underneath. We resumed our work and Mr Zeko never returned.

Jasna: Did you see that? As if the sky will fall if he lets us say anything about how to cut them.

Me: I know. Maybe I can try and speak to them about this.

Stevan: They'll probably listen to you. You've got a university degree. We're just with high-school education. They won't even look at us.

7.7 Concluding Remarks

This final comment reveals that, to an extent, workers do end up developing a sense of their "inferior" cultural resources that impose very real limits upon their capacity to act in the factory. This, however, does not mean that they cannot try to define how those superiors who *can* act with a larger degree of autonomy, ought to relate to those who cannot. Needless to say, such efforts do not lead them to question the fundamental politics of the actual division of labour (see Ouroussoff 1993: 294). This is because workers see nothing problematic in the idea that the factory as a whole ought to be governed by the "experts" in possession of the appropriate cultural and symbolic capital (education, knowledge and authority), which they themselves lack. What they do see as

a problem, however, is the failure by management to recognize them as more than inanimate tools of production who are not allowed the opportunity to reflect on even the most basic tasks of production with which they are entrusted. The end result of this managerial meddling was not to deskill workers, who in fact retained their superior grasp of specific production techniques. Rather, it created a sharp sense of separation between upstairs and downstairs and reinforced a different kind of experience of personhood between them. Whereas managers (and to a lesser extent, office workers) see themselves as free individuals with the ability to control the world around them, workers see themselves in terms of their inferior position within an overarching web of social relations (cf Ouroussoff 1993: 294; Carrier 1995: 197). Both end up having a different experience of personhood within the labour process and project these different experiences onto each other.

From the point of view of “upstairs”, manual workers are just a different and inferior kind of possessive individual defined by one dominant property – physical labour. This view also plays into “upstairs workers” conceptions of themselves as members of a superior class endowed with the requisite cultural and symbolic capital to manage this labour. From the point of view of “downstairs”, managers are the selected elite whose main responsibility is to ensure a harmonious workplace environment that satisfies not only the economic needs of everyone involved, but also their social and moral needs. Shop floor workers do not think that management and hierarchy are superfluous or that they themselves should run the factory. What they do think is that hierarchy should be of a social kind that recognizes workers in their totality as moral subjects, instead of an asocial one that sees in them only one partible aspect: their labour. In this sense, the end result is often a mismatch between reality and expectations and a continuous struggle of views over what the workplace ought to be about. The question of valuing labour is

another example of these struggles where workers refuse to internalize and adhere to the market model that tries to interpellate them as monadic individuals competing over scarce resources. In response, workers bring into the factory their own ideology of labour and value, neither of which can be reduced to a technical operation or precise measurement of individual activities, and is instead, a multi-layered social relation between non-equals. Shop floor discipline is secured neither by manufacturing consent nor by deskilling but rather, by the ongoing process of social and cultural separation and alienation that structures the possibilities and limits of social interaction in the workspace, and thereby the prevailing form of hierarchy and inequality. I will explore this conclusion more thoroughly in the next chapter.

Chapter VIII: Manners, Personhood and the New Class

8.1 Introduction: Joking and Avoidance

To better understand how emerging class distinctions and forms of hierarchy on the shop floor are inhabited, regulated, and reproduced we can briefly turn to two old anthropological concepts, namely “joking relations” and “avoidance relations” (Radcliffe-Brown 1940; Mauss 2013). Joking relations are, despite their name, not primarily about humour but refer to “a relationship of playful aggression” (Graeber 2007: 16) predicated on a suspension of formality and the “intentional invocation of the very things that would be most likely to cause embarrassment in other situations” (ibid: 17). Joking partners are continuously engaged “in sham fights and sexual horseplay, of lewd accusations and scatological jokes” through which mutuality and equality of status is both emphasized and challenged (ibid). In other words, even though joking can involve power plays and the renegotiation of status of persons or groups vis-à-vis each other, the very possibility of entering into such relations implies a certain level of shared commonality between all parties involved.

Avoidance relations on the other hand are often, but not always, hierarchical in nature and defined by a formidable degree of formality to the extent that one party is usually placed in a position from which they cannot speak or even gaze upon the other. In other words one party is obliged to pay respect, and avoid such things as establishing contact, speaking first or manifesting aggressive physical behaviour. In a sense joking relationships and avoidance relationships are polar opposites of each other which would allow us to position any relationship between two people on the continuum between them (ibid: 16). In this sense they are not mutually exclusive and neither can be said to

exist in their pure form, which is to say that there is no social situation where either pure hierarchy or pure equality is on display (Weiner 1992: 99). Joking and avoidance are simply taken to represent here two opposing tendencies that allow us to frame and analyse certain forms of social interaction in the workplace in order to investigate how certain distinctions between groups and individuals develop into more or less stable forms of hierarchy.

I will not enter debates here about the cross-cultural applicability of such concepts (Brant 1948), nor am I interested in refuting old structural-functionalist myths that saw joking as but one more ritual for stabilizing social structure (Johnson & Freedman 1978), or for identifying possible marriage partners (Sykes 1966). The point of this chapter is to investigate the way in which everyday shop floor practices that roughly correspond to “joking” and “avoidance as defined above, shape the social terrain on which class distinctions and notions of personhood are shaped and contested, and to link these practices to the wider context of privatisation, property and marketization. I suggest that joking allows workers to maintain horizontal networks of mutuality that recognize the embedded, relational self and also to nurture, at the imaginative level, the possibility of alternative social and moral worlds. Avoidance on the other hand allows elites to control the form and content of their relations with workers and also to minimize the chances that the familiarity generated by joking might diminish the impressions created by their “ritually managed appearance” (Scott 1990: 13). What we see in avoidance then is the “varied art of marking distances” (Bourdieu 1996: 66) through which moral and social disconnections become legitimized and symbolically reified.

This operative distinction between avoidance and joking corresponds largely to the distinction Bakhtin made between the logic of the medieval “feast” and that of

“carnival” in his study of Rabelais. The role of official religious feast was, Bakhtin writes, to invoke the past in order to “consecrate the present” and assert “all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing ... moral values, norms and prohibitions” (Bakhtin 1984: 9). As such the feast was “monolithically serious” and sought to eliminate laughter from its performance, but only to have it reappear in the popular sphere of the marketplace in the form of carnival. There, carnival stands in opposition to the official feast as a “temporary liberation” from order and a suspension of “all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Carnival was the feast of becoming, change and renewal” (ibid: 10). Carnival, Bakhtin writes “is the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter. It is a festive life” (ibid: 8).

This is of course a mirror image of Turner’s understanding of *liminality*, but the important point here is Bakhtin’s suggestion that the subversive power of carnival consists in its rituals of embodiment, or the way in which the “high, the ideal and the abstract” are brought “down to a strongly emphasized bodily level of food, drink, digestion and sexual life” (ibid: 20). I believe Bakhtin’s distinction between feast and carnival teases out an important feature of joking relations. They are in a sense carnivalesque, festive, filled with laughter and emphasize mutuality and connectedness by treating the body as a kind of “common substance”. Unlike Bakhtin however I see joking relations as subversive not so much of rank and hierarchy, but of the attempts by management to define the nature of relations in production. In other words, joking, if and when deployed does not threaten to subvert hierarchy as much as it threatens to “socialize” an impersonal or “asocial” form of inequality but also to foster more intimate horizontal social relations between workers on the shop floor (cf. Osella and Osella 1998: 199).

8.1.2 Corollary Modes of Personhood

The other suggestion that I will be trying to put forward here is that the joking and avoidance correspond to, and simultaneously reinforce two different forms of understanding personhood. Whereas for workers personhood is defined in terms of their relation to others within a larger moral community, owners and managers are defined in terms of their own “properties”, both in the sense of possessions and qualities (see Dunn 2004: 125; Graeber 2007: 21). If joking bodies are immersed in the social world and in touch with each other, avoidance places them in an abstract, impersonal and highly formalized level where contact is mediated by abstract market forces.

Avoidance relations however, are not necessarily generalized by the marketization of society and joking relations still permeate the social space of the shop floor. If avoidance is closer to the person as a “possessive individual” (McPherson 1962) joking does quite the opposite, i.e. people in a sense become “dispossessed individuals.” As already argued, workers imagine themselves as anything but free to dispose of their “properties” as they see fit (including their labour-power). Both the larger context of the privatization and their immediate experiences at the workplace imply that they are more likely to see themselves as forcefully dispossessed and dependent on the good will of powerful others upon which they must operate. The challenge therefore lies in eliciting this good will, and getting those who are “above” to act as benevolent coordinators and distributors of shared abundance (see Thompson 1991: 345).

The different types of personhood associated with joking and avoidance are pivotal in this struggle for realignment. Avoidance threatens to limit the relationship between owners and workers to an exchange of labour for cash, whereas joking has the potential to embed individuals into social networks of mutual obligation. One appears conducive to the logic of impersonal market exchange whereas the other directly challenge its

underlying assumptions. Controlling where exactly on this continuum a relationship will unfold is crucial for regulating structures of power and domination in the workplace.

Strathern makes the point that in Melanesian gift economies “those who dominate are those who determine the connections and disconnections created by the circulation of objects” (Strathern 1988: 167, also in Dunn 2004: 129). What she is referring to are the social relations created by acts of gift exchange, but in equal measure we might assert that within the factory, power can be seen to reside with those who determine the connections and disconnections between people created during the daily exchange of labour for cash. After all, workers come to the factory in order to earn wages in exchange for their labour. This activity can take the form of an impersonal relation mediated by markets and disconnected by rituals of avoidance but it can also become embedded in relations of mutuality that are animated by the informality of joking. The question is how, and when, does one form prevail over another and who gains (or loses) in the process.

My analysis of emerging class distinctions and the reification of symbolic capital in the figure of the owner paints an ambiguous picture. On a certain level the owners, and their managerial proxies, are certainly able to control and determine the kinds of connections that can be established between workers and themselves as their immediate superiors, often by acquiring and maintaining the requisite symbolic capital. Workers however are more than able to operate outside the narrow limits of the impersonal market model and reproduce forms of sociability that emphasize commonality and mutual obligations. One might say that workers simply refuse to internalize the figure of the possessive individual of market society and are more than capable of imagining a different kind of economic model, one that is populated by embedded individuals, interacting in accordance with socially defined norms of morality and mutuality. However, this also

leads to a recognition of their status as subjugated and to a deferral of political agency to their immediate superiors. If the individual who “acts on the world by acting on others” is very much alive in the market society she does not necessarily stand as an impediment to the reproduction of structures of economic extraction that concentrate wealth in the hands of a selected elite. In fact, recognizing those in power as uniquely responsible and capable of restoring moral order, often does the double work of legitimizing economic inequalities and transforming them into distinctions of an “acceptable” and depoliticised symbolic order. At this point, let me turn to some ethnography to illustrate what has been said thus far.

8.2 Joking Between Men and Women

If we work our way upwards we can start from the relationship between the workers themselves. The first thing one notices on the shop floor is the extent to which joking relationships permeate the social space between persons during the working day. The content of “joking” is intensely vulgar in nature and usually revolves around sexual acts, marriage, reproduction or personal intelligence. Jasna and Ruzha are a common target in the cutting section as they are both young and unmarried, as well as Zhare, one of the power cutters who is also regularly exposed to teasing and abuse on account of his, often unorthodox, conceptions of romance. In general though, almost any utterance being shared in the shop floor environment can quickly be seized upon to engage in teasing and joking of this kind.

On one occasion we were discussing my experiences from living abroad. Vanya in particular was asking me about what kind of work one can usually find in countries like Malta and the UK, where I had lived. At some point Ruzha joined the conversation as

well. While I was listing the sorts of jobs people from ex-Yugoslavia usually end up doing, Kocho interrupted me and turning to Ruzha shouted: “Stop asking about all these jobs, why don’t you ask if there’s something from your specific trade. Ask if there’s any work for strippers there.” Everyone burst into laughter, earning a stern look from Ruzha in the process. Some days later both Ruzha and Mr. Zeko arrived late at work within ten minutes of each other, prompting immediate remarks from Panche: “Ruzha, how was it with the boss eh? You two are very suspicious?”

The teasing is not unilateral and Ruzha and Jasna often make fun of the men. This is usually done by implying that they are either poor husbands who are unable to “satisfy” their wives, or that they are unable to get wives to begin with. Married men were often teased as being “useless”, in the sense that they are of no interest or have no value for single women. Pointing at me, Badev would regularly tease Jasna saying in front of everyone: “I think Jasna finally found a bachelor here to hang on to! Is that right Jasna, you’re going to hang on to this guy now?” (The fact that I was engaged mattered little.) Jasna would restate their sexual uselessness: “They’re all married, except for Kocho here, he’s a little punk, too young to be married yet, nobody will take him.” This time the young women began to laugh while Kocho was shaking his head. He did not wait too long though for an opportunity to retaliate. He complained that he was thirsty and Jasna took out her bottle of water and gave it to him, immediately generating an exchange:

Kocho: Thank you.

Jasna: Thank you? What good do I get from your thanks? (In colloquial Macedonian this expression usually implies in a teasing way that one would benefit more from material gifts instead of intangible gratitude.)

Kocho: Ok I'll give it to you then. (This expression implies offering sex with which Kocho is "materialising" his gratitude in the shape of his sexual organ.)

Jasna began rolling her eyes in disbelief. Kocho however took the abuse even further and began explaining to Strasho how he had read somewhere recently that "deep down inside, a lot of women dream of being raped." After that statement I began to feel somewhat uncomfortable but Jasna, failing to display any sense of feeling threatened looked at me and said in a loud voice "It's a shame that you will only get to hear stupid and immature things in the factory. Can you see what kinds of *idiots* I have to deal with every day here?" Sometimes however, acts of teasing and ridicule could produce cross-gender alliances. I noted an incident when Strasho had a massive toothache to the point that he was barely able to work and his face was twitching in agony. Jasna took out some painkillers and handed him one saying "Take this it's really strong, I take it when I get my period." Strasho swallowed one immediately but despite his lamentable situation Kocho could not let such an opportunity pass. "You'll get your period now Strasho!" Ruzha caught on saying: "Don't worry Strasho I've got sanitary napkins with me as well", at which we all started laughing.

Some of these exchanges were facilitated by fact that the young women were unmarried, in spite of being well into their twenties. Consequently they still occupied an unstable liminal position of immaturity which opens up the space for commentaries that would prove far too socially embarrassing for married women. For example, one of Jasna's regular rituals was sharing sexual jokes that she had read on the internet that were anything but repressive, such as: "This girl says to her friend 'Yesterday I put some eye drops in my eyes and then I put a few down there as well.' Her friend asked her why did she do that and the girl answers 'Because she hasn't seen anything in a while as well.'" Such jokes formed part of her regular complaints that she was not

getting enough “sex”, which were never made by married women. Marriage operates as a marker of social status and imposes certain limits on the “joking relationship.” This is not to say that married women were never teased, but that sexual teasing could only be done by proxy, that is, through the figure of their husbands or other indirect objects.

During the lunch break for example, Bache would regularly tease Rodna and Blaguna about their sexual relations with their spouses but would never in their presence place himself as the protagonist. Rodna was a regular target as she had been married for some years but had difficulties conceiving. Whenever we sat down on the same table Bache would begin teasing her about how she and her husband are not having enough sex and give her suggestions of how and when to “do it.” On most days he would also pack a banana in his lunchbox and would invariably make sexual insinuations to the women on the table by offering them to “have a bite”. Rodna would giggle like a little girl out of embarrassment and urge him to stop. Even though direct, the banana exercise still maintained the necessary social distance required by married women as a penis-by-proxy. He would place himself in the lead role only when sharing hilarious details about his sexual activities with his wife.

There is no doubt that joking relations between men and women draw upon established gender norms and inequalities, but it also unsettles them through the playful aggression structured around sexuality. Frivolous offers by the men to sexually “penetrate” the women are met by a variety of responses. They include ridiculing the men’s capacity for sexual performance, manifesting a humiliating indifference to their advances or even by feminizing male bodies. Such exchanges should not be seen as attempts to preserve some level of female sexual modesty, but as precisely that kind of “sham fight and sexual horseplay” in which we can see the “breaking down of normality, and of distance

and hierarchy, and a necessary prelude to the fostering of intimacy” (Osella and Osella 1998: 199).

8.2.1 Joking and Ethnicity

Ethnicity is another social marker in the shop floor and is most visibly seen in the relationship between Macedonian and Roma workers. Roma workers are considered relative newcomers in the privatized garment industry. Due to their social marginality, relatively low educational levels and exclusion from most spheres of public life, they were among the first categories of workers to end up being a "surplus population" during the first wave of privatization¹⁵. Most ended up in the informal economy as street vendors or smugglers. Recent efforts by the government, however, have made it attractive for employers to hire Roma workers whose wages are in part subsidized by the state. By the time I arrived in the factory there was already a small “Gypsy brigade” in the stitching section and another six Roma workers (two men and four women) employed as cleaners and sweepers. Their entry into the factory however has had ambiguous reactions from other workers given that they occupy the very bottom of Shtip’s ethno-cultural hierarchy. They are often stigmatized as the “polluting Other” and most Macedonians tend to structure their relations with the Roma along the lines of avoidance.

On one occasion I had mentioned to Jasna and Ruzha that the Roma in Shtip look far more integrated than in Skopje, the capital: “There a lot here working shoulder to shoulder with the Macedonians and earning their bread.” Jasna immediately replied saying “Yes and we’re shoulder to shoulder with them too.” This seemingly tautological

¹⁵ See study by the European Roma Rights Centre (1998: 52).

commentary was meant to indignantly point out that the status of Macedonian workers had dropped to such historically low levels that they were now economically and socially commensurable with the low ranking “Gypsies.” However, this daily intermingling in the workplace did open up a new space in which Macedonian and Roma workers could engage in the same kinds of playful aggression and sexual horseplay typical of joking that both operated through and unsettled hierarchical distinctions between the groups.

The cleaners, Usnija and Esma were the most common participants in such exchanges, both on the shop floor and the upstairs office. Much of it took the familiar form of “offering” brides and sexual teasing involving their husbands. Curiously enough, sexual horseplay sometimes extended even between men. On one occasion whilst we were working, Fadil, the sweeper, had been sweeping the leftovers from the cloth we were cutting when Kocho shouted out at him: “Fadil, my friend! What did I tell you? Ten o’clock sharp wait for me in the kitchen, I want to see you bent over in the kitchen and I’ll come and give it to you nice. I’m gonna fuck you!” I was rather stunned by this outburst, but later on I learned that it was part of a mutual homosexual aggression between some of the Roma workers and the Macedonian ones. Fadil for example would shout back to Kocho: “I found someone in town that can do you real well!” and keep on sweeping. On another occasion while I was working on layering I suddenly heard Strasho laughing really loud behind me. When I turned around I saw him next to Ali, the other sweeper, who was holding his broom and looking a little bedazzled. Strasho walked towards Kocho still laughing and began explaining, “Oh man you should’ve seen Ali! I stuck this pen up his bum and he jumped like a scared rabbit it was so funny!” They continued laughing together whilst Ali kept on sweeping and shaking his head in disbelief.

It is worth noting that this kind of teasing and sexual aggression was never present in relationships between male Macedonian workers. More than gender, these minor abuses revolved around sexuality and the definition of the dominant sexual partner. In other words, sexuality operated as the terrain on which hierarchical distinctions of class, gender and ethnicity were being renegotiated through acts of playful aggression (see also Lambevski 1999; Yelvington 1996: 329). On the one hand workers reaffirm established hierarchies between men and women, or Macedonians and Roma, that are brought into the shop floor from the “outside” and released through the content of the joking. But at the same time there is a tacit understanding that on the shop floor they all stand “shoulder to shoulder” as assembly line workers, which gives everyone licence to engage in joking relations. This means that even though the isolated instances of joking rely on existing social inequalities, the reciprocal nature of the relationship means that “such attacks can be expected to more or less balance out in the end” (Graeber 2007: 19). The point here is that sharing this social space could lead over time to closer ties. Esma for example, who had been in the factory the longest, was able to forge a strong enough relationship with Mitko for him to agree to stand as her guarantor for a bank loan. This in itself is a highly sensitive issue and failure on her part to meet the monthly bank payments would transfer the burden to Mitko which would almost inevitably bring him total financial ruin. Such favours are usually granted only to people with whom one shares an intimate relation of trust, developed over time.

To this I would add that the conditions of reciprocity that allow for this balancing to occur mainly exist in the social space of the factory. Such joking relations between Roma and Macedonians, or men and women are rarely replicated in outdoor situations. It is within the factory’s wage labour system, where they all stand in relation to each other as homogenous “exchange values”, that workers acquire a heightened sense of

their social commensurability (Lapavistas 2003: 25). On the inside, workers share the same liminal position as a precarious and highly unstable labour force which allows them to engage in status competitions with one another. But whilst the commoditization of labour imposes a certain level of equivalence between workers, at the same time it generates status distinctions in relation to persons that appear unaffected, or beyond the determinants of commoditization. I am, of course referring here to the new elites, whether owners or managers, who really are able to act autonomously. It therefore suggests to me that, “commodity production and exchange ... can generate social identities in terms of the position of social categories in relation to the market” (Stirrat 1989: 101); and that this is in turn reflected in the modalities of joking and avoidance. This raises some important questions about the relationship between mannerisms, personhood and class identities that I will explore in the rest of this chapter.

8.3 Avoidance and Management

We saw in the brief discussion on joking the extent to which social relations are very vividly “brought down” to a bodily level. The form and content of joking involves a constant exchange of “substances”, i.e. “stuff flowing in, or flowing out” such as semen, blood or food (Graeber 2007: 21). These substances mark the presence and immersion of the body in the social world. Relations of avoidance however, tend to “set the body apart from the world. To a very large extent, the physical body itself is negated, the person translated into some higher or more abstract level” (ibid). Before I get into more detail regarding what this might mean I will illustrate the way in which avoidance relationships come to life as soon as one begins to move upwards in the hierarchy of the workplace.

The immediate superior to workers in the cutting section is Mr Zeko, the shop floor boss, who does engage in minor joking relations with the other workers. Up until recently, Mr Zeko had also been “shoulder to shoulder” with the other workers, before getting promoted. Additionally he is a regular and familiar figure on the town’s *korzo* where he engages in similar movement patterns as the other workers. In his absence, he was a regular object of ridicule and forms of abuse that included the usual references to sexuality. In fact every time Mr Zeko fell into one of his tantrums the usual explanation was to suggest that his wife is probably tired of him and that “She’s not giving him any.” His anger was thus embodied as an unreleased bodily urge, a contained substance.

Needless to say such joking would never take place in Mr Zeko’s presence. Some minor banter might occur but bodily fluids and sexuality were not acceptable topics.

Sometimes the young women would be able to use this to their advantage and place Mr Zeko in an uncomfortable position, especially when making excuses about missing work. In the first weeks of my presence on the shop floor I witnessed an exchange between Mr Zeko and Ruzha that captured this. We were layering with Ruzha on our usual spot when Mr Zeko arrived to give Ruzha grief for not showing up at work the previous day. “Where were you yesterday? You think just because you texted me to say you can’t come everything is fine?” Ruzha immediately fired her reply “Boss I really couldn’t make it. My period pains were killing me. If you only knew how much blood came out of me yesterday! My tampon was soaked.”

“Ok, ok just stop. Don’t tell me any more I don’t need to know this”, Mr Zeko replied as his face grimaced in disgust and walked away in a different direction, leaving Ruzha with a self-satisfied smirk. Aretxaga writes that menstrual blood is often experienced as a “polluting substance that must be hidden from discourse as it is from sight” because it stands as a metonym for both motherhood and sexuality and “the dangerously

uncontrolled nature of women's flesh" (1995: 139). Whereas this may have been true in catholic Ireland, relations among workers in the factory in Shtip suggest that female sexuality is anything but "repressed". My own interpretation is that the reason for Mr Zeko's reaction lies not in the threatening nature of "women's flesh" but in the disruption that the introduction of bodily substances bring into the formality and hierarchy of avoidance relations. Mazni for example often compared Mr Zeko to the dreaded miser and spoke of him as someone who's "never bought anyone a drink even though he's loaded." Mr Zeko's refusal to engage with workers at the "bodily level", whether through sexual horseplay or the sharing of drinks, separates him from the social body of shop floor workers and the thicker bonds of mutuality and indebtedness that are thus generated.

Things however get a little bit more straightforward when it comes to Mr Samoritch, the general manager. Mr Samoritch enjoys genuine power over social relations in the factory and his presence on the shop floor instantly generates an ambient of avoidance. Workers would never, unless absolutely necessary, make eye contact with him when he descends on the shop floor to run his check-ups. Even in his absence, I could hear nothing but mild and isolated attempts at ridicule or abuse. Mr Samoritch was never discussed in terms of his bodily substance but exclusively in terms of his excessive authoritarianism and capacity to get things his own way. On some occasions I heard commentaries that both undermined and reaffirmed his position of power such as: "Samoritch is making at least 120k per month [EUR2000] but for what? He hasn't gone on holidays for one day. All that money and not one single trip to Spain or Greece." Mr Samoritch's body is here depicted as non-sensual, or lacking the capacity for worldly enjoyment. His is a closed, disciplined body not immersed in the everyday festivity of bodily substances and is literally above them. His is an austere lifestyle, defined by his

work discipline and unwillingness to engage in acts of conspicuous consumption. Such qualities position him outside the workers' moral economy of redistribution and closer to the reviled figure of the miser. This directly influences the kind of demands and claims that workers feel they can make (or not) in his presence.

On one occasion, we were having a coffee break in the gazebo outside the factory, when a woman from the stitching section started complaining. Apparently, she had made an error that caused a minor delay in production and her line manager told her to go upstairs and explain her actions to Mr Samoritch: "Why the hell do I have to go upstairs? I made a mistake OK, I'll get fined, but why do I have to go and get embarrassed and change colours in front of the manager?" Kocho, who was calmly listening and smoking a cigarette replied "What? Do you want *him* to come downstairs?", after which we all burst out laughing at the very impossibility of Mr Samoritch coming down to her level to explain things. It was a laughter filled with both mockery and indignation with the unfairness of the arrangement. But even more interesting is the explicitly stated preference to maintain a bodily distance from Mr Samoritch. In his presence, she remains a body, but a submissive one, "changing colours" out of embarrassment and denied the possibility of establishing a reciprocal joking relationship with him, as he is in a sense body-less. Instead, she locates the more appropriate response to her mistake in simply being "fined", thereby modelling the relationship along the lines of an impersonal monetary exchange that is strictly analogous to the logic of avoidance.

We need to look at this specific relationship in the context of the changing political economy of the town. My argument, in short, is that the reduction of labour to an "exchange value" and the larger efforts to reorganize society around market principles, is refracted in the way that joking and avoidance relationships are shaping the social

hierarchies of the workplace. Much more than a dynamics of interpersonal relations, avoidance relationships in the factory can also be one way in which “a whole social class or stratum marks itself off from those it considers below it” (Graeber 2007: 27). In doing so, an entire array of arbitrary hierarchical distinctions between workers and employers (or their representatives) become *naturalized* and objectified in the body at the same time they are being challenged (Bourdieu 1996: 68).

8.3 Embodying Social Difference

To better illustrate what I mean by this we can turn to the figure of the owner of the factory, Mr Svemojski and his wife and co-owner Mrs Svemojska. Mr Svemojski is the far more frequently discussed person on the shop floor and is usually referred to as the *gazda* (pl. *gazdi*) whereas Mrs Svemojska is referred to as *gazdarica*, the feminine derivative of *gazda*. “Gazda” is a Hungarianized version of the Slavic term “gospodin”, meaning “lord”, “master” or “gentleman”. “Gazda” is used in many south Slavic languages and carries a variety of meanings, the most common of which are “head of household”, “rich man”, “owner”, “employer” or “person of influence” (Zirojević 2005).

Factory owners in Shtip are collectively referred to as *gazdi*. The term refers to a *new* elite, altogether qualitatively different from the old socialist technocracy. For example, when referring to the head of an SOE people would normally use the technical term “direktor” or “upravnik”, but never “gazda”. *Gazdi* are recognized as a distinct social cohort, characterized not only by wealth and property rights, but, as argued in Chapter V, by their capacity to act autonomously and control outcomes. But the world of *gazdi* is not just warded off by wealth, power and influence. It is also bracketed off

and placed “above nature” as more refined, disciplined and out of reach of shop floor labourers. What I would like to do in the rest of this chapter then, is explore the links between the emerging regimes of private property and the emergence of a class of people “who internalize its logic of exclusion as a way of defining their own social persons” (Graeber 2007: 34), and then link this back the discussion on personhood and the politics of dependence.

On the shop floor the *gazda* is mainly felt through his conspicuous absence, both physically and socially. This was not always so. Mitko, for example, who personally knew Mr Svemojski, often reminisced about how the *gazda* used to be much more accessible in the early days of the factory. Sometimes he would even lend a hand on the shop floor: “I remember when we were starting out he was here with the rest of us. He was carrying sewing machines and helping to set up the place.” Mitko told me that he also spent time with his workers outside the factory: “He used to play basketball with us for a while. But then suddenly he started distancing himself. I don’t know why.”

Interestingly, this distancing has taken place in tandem with the growth and transformation of the factory, from a makeshift and improvised production site, into one of the most respected garment factories in the city. Concomitantly, the *gazda* has been showcasing this success by engaging in various forms of conspicuous consumption. Workers are reminded of this daily as they have to walk past the *gazda*’s private car park, located on the side of the main entrance, before they can enter the factory. Such open displays of the *gazda*’s capacity to appropriate and indulge in objects of luxury are met with an ambiguous response by workers, who see in these displays of opulence a potentially powerful patron, but also an increasingly distant one.

Consumption, however, is not the only sphere where this ambiguity is reproduced. As already mentioned, the *gazda* rarely made his presence felt, but whenever he did in fact

make an appearance it was common to dress it up in a ceremony of avoidance. The first time I saw the *gazda* on the shop floor (and in general) was precisely one such occasion. His arrival was announced by Mr Zeko who came to our table and told us that the owner would be arriving that afternoon with some “important people” to showcase the factory. It was our job to make sure we appeared thrifty, coordinated and disciplined. We were explicitly told not to talk or engage in any form of banter or frivolous behaviour. This is precisely what we did for much of the afternoon in expectation of the visit. When the owner finally materialized we immersed ourselves even more thoroughly in our work whilst he slowly approached our table accompanied by an impeccably dressed couple. I merely managed to catch a glimpse of them through the corner of my eye as they were nearing, and could hear the owner explaining the production process in English behind me: “This is where the layering is done, and here you can see the fine cutting. And over here in the next section...” We maintained our silence as they drifted off towards the stitching section before Ruzha broke ranks to comment on how “handsome” and “refined” the couple accompanying the owner was. Their finesse was all the more augmented when contrasted with our hunched up figures, covered in sweat and threads. In comparison we truly appeared coarse, venal and servile, whereas they appeared sublimated, aloof and out of reach (see Bourdieu 1996: 7). There was not even the remotest possibility of workers being introduced to the “important people” as *people*. (In fact, in the *gazda*’s description there were no *people* and only autonomous activities such as “layering”, “fine cutting”, “stitching” etc.)

This fine art of marking distinctions is clearly resonates in the way in which workers perceive the owner. I first noticed this in the embroidery room where I was sent by an irate Mr Zeko as punishment for accidentally messing up a pile of cuffs. After a bit of training I started cleaning threads from the embroidered logos when Vale, who was

working next to me asked if I had gotten in the factory because I knew the owners. This was a common assumption whenever I mentioned that I was not actually an employee but doing research. I replied in the negative and asked whether she knew the owners herself. She said no. She had had been in the factory only a few months, during which she caught a glimpse of the owner only once. “We were sitting here and someone said look there’s the *gazda* and it was him. He was very well dressed and had a dignified figure you know, you could tell he’s the *gazda*, he looks like someone important. He was very handsome too. His clothes and all made him look very dignified [dostoinstven]. You could just tell he’s a different level. Not like us working people, we are *nikakvi*.” The adjective *nikakvi* can be literally translated as “formless” or “resembling nothing” and is commonly used to express a lack of aesthetic value in an object, and can also mean “worthless”.

Somewhat taken aback by this strong assertions I said that there are also dignified people in the working classes, to which she replied “Yes but you can easily tell the difference between him and the rest of us. *If you had just seen him you would’ve thought the same.*” I could hardly disagree with this and I certainly *did* feel different on the two occasions when the owner appeared on the shop floor. A well-groomed and suited figure simply stands out in such a setting. I then said that I heard that the *gazda*’s father was also a very important figure in Shtip and that he used to be the general manager of one of the town’s most important enterprises during socialism. She said she knew about that and that it’s normal for people like the *gazda* who come from a good family to rise above the rest and make it big in life. “The rest of us from poor families don’t really have a chance. Very rarely will someone from our ranks get ahead and make it in life.” Mazni had pretty much the same to say when describing the *gazda*:

“I’ve never met him but I’ve seen him when he comes around sometimes, not very often though. He’s left the whole thing to the managers here and he doesn’t care about the details. He’s a real *gazda* he doesn’t *do* anything. You know his father was a *big man* [golem chovek] too and he inherited a lot of money from him. His wife is from Skopje and she’s got family connections in [important places], you know it all fits into place.”

Such comments reflect the growing stabilization of, what are still relatively new, socio-economic differences, but it also suggests that workers do not see the factory as an assembly of free individuals, some of which are more “gifted” than others. Instead they deploy a conceptual scheme by that sees a direct link between the position people occupy in the wider society and their position in the factory (see Ourousoff 1993: 294). Bodies merely provide the “goods to think with” about the wider social relations in which they are immersed (see Leach 1985: 45, for commentary on Levi-Strauss’ famed phrase). For example, on one occasion during the lunchbreak one of the women spoke of how well the *gazdarica* looked the last time she made an appearance in the factory. She had apparently lost a lot of weight and there was talk that she had even gotten a facelift. Another woman immediately drew a comparison: “*She’s not like us* Blaguna! When *we* get old there’s no going back. We’re all spent, it’s the end.” We see once more here the way in which class difference is embodied. Whether deformed by age, worn out by toil, or poorly clothed and fed by their low wages, workers are exposed to the world’s forces that visibly imprint themselves on their bodies. Bodily pain and disfigurement are in fact a very common way for workers to reflect on the wage labour regime on the shop floor.

The bodies of the *gazdi* on the other hand are removed from the world. They are translated into some higher level where they are not governed by the same rules and are endowed with the capacity to defy nature and aging. We must highlight that it is not

merely the *gazda's* expensive clothes that make him look dignified. In fact, there was at least one male worker in the packaging section that showed up every day at work wearing a clean ironed shirt, neatly tucked into his trousers. He certainly did stick out, but as an object of ridicule. Other workers would tease him as he passed by, mock his “vanity” and ask each other “Who the hell does he think he is?” He could be gazed upon, scrutinized and absorbed by laughter. The owner could not. On the shop floor workers could only hope to get an illicit sneak-peek of him at a safe distance and so recognize a far more fundamental gap in between them. It is through this gap of avoidance that the *gazda's* body truly becomes different.

On another occasion I witnessed a similar event when the owner appeared on the shop floor with a bus load of European Union diplomats. The diplomats were part of an EU mission to Macedonia and led by the UK ambassador charged with the task of promoting EU values. I had read in the news, a few days prior to their appearance, that they were touring Macedonian towns and acquainting themselves with the different municipalities in the country. No one knew exactly how, but somehow the owner had managed to come into contact with them and convince them to take the time to visit his garment factory. Such promotional visits I later understood were not infrequent and made a great deal of economic sense given that the factory often received orders from various state ministries from abroad to stitch uniforms for all sorts of public servants. Once more we were similarly prepared for the great event and there was considerable excitement in the air at the prospect of such a dignified visit. We were once more at our best behaviour, busying ourselves around the cutting tables and looking as diligent as possible.

When the visit did actually take place it turned out to be somewhat of a let-down. From our table (which was around fifty meters away from the entrance to the shop floor) we

could only get a glimpse of a large group of well-dressed people that were literally marched in and out of the shop floor by the owner in little more than five minutes. “Was that all?” Ruzha asked. After they were safely out Lachki cynically commented that “Maybe they were afraid that if they stay longer they might ask us what *we* think of the factory.” Lachki’s comment is critical of the practice of avoidance, which is precisely to limit social interaction so that workers cannot make claims on the dominant. But while there was certainly some disappointment with the asocial nature of the visit, it did strengthen the general feeling that there really existed an insurmountable barrier between the worlds of workers and the esteemed visitors. The following day Lachki commented that he had seen the group of diplomats on his way home after work. They were seated in one of the town’s best known restaurants and most popular among the local *gazdi*. Grigoriy immediately commented:

Grigoriy: What did I tell you yesterday? That from here they’ll be off to feast. And those people know how to eat. Oh my can they eat! They’ve got experience. They spend their whole lives eating. They can eat a whole cow. And they go straight for the meat. Not like us. We don’t know how to eat. We sit down and they give us some soup and some bread and we start eating like there’s no tomorrow and by the time the meat gets to the table we’re already full, we can’t have any more. I remember when we were kids and we used to go play volleyball in the next town. After the game they would take us to a restaurant and we’d all get stuffed with the soup. Then when they brought the rest we scolded ourselves for not being patient. But these people know how to do it. They skip the soup and go straight for the meat. And they take their time. That’s why they’re so fat. It takes a lifetime of eating.

As far as social practices go, *eating* is oddly apt for capturing the rift between the world of workers and that of the *gazda*, particularly as it is perceived by the workers. Class difference here is recognized as a difference in manners and acquired taste. Whereas

workers appear as uncouth and impatient, in the world of *gazdi* one finds cultured persons whose finesse is acquired through prolonged contact with others like them and through a lifetime of practice (Bourdieu 1996: 66). The world of the *gazda* appears as once again disciplined, resourceful and refined, but also filled with abundance. Workers on the other hand can only create a carnivalesque simulacrum of abundance.

8.4 The *Gazda* as a “Big Man”

Another particularly important mark of distinction in the Macedonian context are relations with western Europeans which is a sign of cosmopolitanism and connectedness, conferring culture and prestige to those able to forge them (see Neofotistos 2010: 897). This careful impression management creates an image of the *gazda* in the factory akin to the Melanesian “Big Man” who accumulates authority by demonstrating particular entrepreneurial abilities and social powers that over time become incorporated as “fixed properties of his bodily person” (Rio 2014: 171). Mitko, for example, said that the owner still says hello to him or waves from his car whenever they bump into each other in town, which, given the small size of Shtip, is not an infrequent occurrence. What is interesting, however, is the way Mitko interprets this gesture from a man who until only recently was ready to “sweat” with him on the shop floor or the basketball court. “It’s not much but a simple ‘Hello Mitko how are you’ means a lot to me you know. Some people say I’m selling myself cheap, but it’s the honour that’s important you know, that he honours me with a simple hello on the street. There are some that wouldn’t even look at you and I can’t stand that pretentiousness.” He stopped to think and then added, “You know he never says hello to me in the factory but always does so when we meet outside.”

Mitko's brief narrative reflects the way in which avoidance practices generate a splitting of the social world into distinct domains, i.e. inside-outside, above-below. We could say that inside the factory, the *gazda* frames their relationship through the medium of impersonal exchange, hence avoidance. This allows the *gazda* to strategically deploy a market ideology by treating the workplace as a small scale market society comprised of individuals freely exchanging their capacities and possessions. I say strategically because this ideology is never strictly adhered to. For example the formality of avoidance can be temporarily suspended whenever there is danger that an order will not be finished on time. In such times both the *gazda* and Mr Samoritch can make a personal appeal to some of the senior workers to pitch in with overtime labour. Such *personal* requests are gladly responded to as they generate the obligation to reciprocate. Senior workers like Mitko and Mechev for example were among the few able to personally ask the *gazda* for an interest-free loan from the company and get it. These loans would usually be paid back over a long period by subtracting a fixed amount from their wages each month. These kinds of loans were common practice during socialism, but whereas then they were accessible to all workers by law, nowadays they have become a privilege granted by employers. This shift has not only augmented the latter's symbolic capital but has opened the conditions for workers to compete with each other over access to the *gazda*.

Avoidance then does not unambiguously uphold a market driven model as much as it allows the *gazda* to control when and how the forging of various bonds and mutual obligations will take place in the factory, since the burden of avoidance always falls on the inferior party. It is in this sense that we can speak of self-disciplining on the shop floor. Simply put, the owner can choose when to interact or be informal, whereas Mitko cannot. It is no surprise then that Mitko should be so honoured by a mere greeting on

the street. Clearly, the value Mitko ascribes to the greeting gesture does not occur in spite of their unequal status, but because of it. After all, a personalized greeting from the Queen, is given far more value than that coming from a co-worker.

Indeed workers spend a great deal of effort in emphasizing how unequal and disempowered they are in relation to the *gazdi*. In doing so, they are actively participating in the reproduction of the *gazda*'s social status, which is itself largely based on the *gazda*'s ability to persuade others to recognize him as such (cf. Graeber 2001: 99). Mitko for example often spoke of the owner as a powerful figure. The best thing about the factory, he would say, was that the *gazda* was a "very well connected, influential and powerful person" and capable of securing regular wages. This image of the *gazda* resonated throughout the shop floor in a variety of contexts. During periods of work scarcity and decreasing orders from foreign partners, the *gazda* could be counted on to "restore prosperity." On one such occasion Mechev complained to me saying "I don't recall the last time there was that little work in the factory." But he was certain that the situation would not last too long: "The *gazda* is a *svetski chovek* [worldly man]. If there's no work he would not be saying that everything is fine. He would say there is no work." The term *svetski* encompasses a variety of meanings in Macedonian, such as cosmopolitan, sophisticated, respectable and well known or famous. A struggling factory does not befit a man of such stature and is surely a temporary crisis. "We're a serious factory after all" Mechev continued, "This place is always been one of the most respected in town. It's embarrassing to say that there's no work at Stichko when we used to give work to other factories."

Damev shared a similar conviction when discussing the temporary lack of orders: "I don't think that a man as big as the *gazda* can go down. This is not his only business. He's got his hands on everything. A bit from here, a bit from there, a fancy car park.

He's got money coming in from more places than here." Vanya was a little less convinced and replied saying "No one ever thought that Makedonka and Astibo would close but they did. You never know." They both agreed though that no matter what happens the *gazdi* will be OK and if anyone gets screwed it would be the workers. Nonetheless the figure of the *gazda* as a *svetski chovek* did much to offset any fears about the future of the factory and the modicum of stability provided by their employment there. Such utterances recognize the *gazda* as a person of considerable autonomy and in possession of an altogether different kind of social capital from workers. The latter can be said to be limited to a kind of embedded social capital in the form of "binding relations" with kin, friends and the local community, whereas the *gazda*'s social capital extends to "bridging relations", or the autonomous capacity to "access economic spaces beyond the community and the region" (Narotzky 2006: 350).

This leads us to another critical aspect of this interplay that has already been hinted at in previous chapters. Pressuring those in power to descend into mundane networks of mutuality and reciprocity also means recognizing them as *really being somehow special* and as "uniquely qualified to re-establish order and prosperity" (Greenough 1983: 847). "Bringing down" then is not so much a challenge on hierarchy but an attempt to rearrange the contours of hierarchy so that "the welfare and the merit of both parties in the exchange takes precedence over other considerations such as the profit of the one or the other" (Greenough 1980: 207; Dunn 2004: 153). As we saw in previous chapters this deferral of power and responsibility is not new and draws on the legacy of the political economy of Yugoslav self-management. But the Yugoslav technocratic elite operated within the larger context of an overarching moral and political economy of institutionalized mutual dependence. Their main source of authority was "expertise", i.e. superior technical knowledge. The general managers of Astibo and Makedonka for

example are often remembered by elderly workers as “professionals” who “knew what they were doing”, but also as accessible people who would “eat with the workers in the canteen”, as Blaguna said once. The new class of *gazdi* however, can rely on an altogether different kind of symbolic capital that allows them to shape and control the connections and disconnections during the everyday exchange of labour for cash, in a context characterized by high levels of precarity and and thus turn *relations* of “social inequality” into a scarce resource and a sought after privilege. This, I argue, has important ramifications for the dialectic between social praxis and the social imagination.

8.5 Deference, Hierarchy and the Political Imagination

It is a very common assertion on the shop floor that the daily injustices suffered by workers are the logical outcome of the *gazda's* absence, or better said, his disconnectedness from the everyday details of running the factory. Below is one typical example. I was having a conversation with Mazni and Kocho on our table and Mazni was sharing with me a long list of grievances about the way workers are being treated in factories nowadays. He spoke of the usual general themes of exploitation and precarity and used the factory as an example. He went into all sorts of detailed number crunching to illustrate the difference between the costs of production and the profits from sale which was another common exercise through which workers demonstrated their criticism of the argument of scarcity of resources as a justification for low wages. In other words, the argument that there is “not enough money” was seen as a blatant manipulation. By contrast, “[Mr Samorich] can ask for whatever salary he wants. He runs the place in effect and you see that the *gazdi* are *never here*. They make a lot of

money but none of it goes to the workers”, said Mazni. I then asked him, since he had been working in the factory for over five years, if he had ever met the *gazda*.

[He] once came here and he was asking where’s Mr Zeko’s office. He owns the place but doesn’t even know where Mr Zeko’s office is! And that’s why things are so bad here in the factory, it’s because the *gazda* doesn’t know anything about what’s going on here. If he knew he wouldn’t allow these things to happen. So what can you do? Sit here and take it. Or get a Bulgarian passport and emigrate¹⁶.

Initially, the idea that the person that benefits the most from the comparatively low wages offered in the factory, would (in theory) oppose the very system that allows him to accumulate wealth, appeared perplexing. One might see in it a textbook case of the operations of symbolic power: the *gazda* is able to obtain symbolic capital by transforming “self-interest into disinterest” (acting *as if* without calculation), thereby masking or legitimizing his “interested” position (Bourdieu 1977: 171; Swartz 1997: 43). While there is much truth in this reading it remains deficient. After all, workers were far from oblivious that it was precisely those things they complained about that made Mr Svemojski a *gazda*. I recall one occasion when the *gazda* appeared briefly on the shop floor to have a word with Mr Samorich and Mrs Peppa who were standing near the shop floor entrance. As we were peeking from our table Jasna said, “Look it’s the *gazda*. Poor guy he has no clue what’s happening in his own factory.” Vancho, displaying his usual scepticism added, “Maybe he wants us to think he has no clue and he’s just playing stupid.” I suggested that “maybe he just doesn’t bother with the little

¹⁶ Since joining the EU in 2007, the Bulgarian state has actively pursued the policy of granting Bulgarian citizenship to ethnic Macedonian applicants in order to bolster its historic claims on Macedonia. Given Macedonia’s international isolation and economic decline following the demise of Yugoslavia, these Bulgarian passports have become highly valued documents for people seeking to emigrate or travel to the EU in pursuit of employment (see Neofotistos 2009). Unofficial estimates suggest that over 20% of Macedonian citizens have so far applied or received Bulgarian passports.

details?” To this Vancho immediately responded saying “It’s from the little details that he makes his money Alex!”

This was of course true, and it was no secret that the entire payment and valuation system on the shop floor that so often infuriated workers with its arbitrariness and complexity, was personally designed by Mrs Svemojska. Yet time and again I encountered complaints by workers where all kinds of daily injustices and perceived moral transgressions in the workplace would often be interpreted as the direct result of the *gazda’s* absence and lack of interest in everyday management. In other words, for most workers, material deprivation is not about diminishing resources but about diminishing social proximity with elites. A vivid example of this occurred each month on payday when there was a regular confrontation between Zhare and Mr Zeko regarding Zhare’s wages. I noted down one of these incidents that always followed a pattern. Mr Zeko would give Zhare the payslip and after a brief look Zhare would go into a fit. Mr Zeko’s immediate response to Zhare’s sudden violation of the formalities of avoidance is to resort to the market logic of the possessive individual and insist that his labour has been appropriately compensated in accordance with the piece rate system. I noted down one of these exchanges:

Zh: It’s nothing! What is this? It’s too little!

Z: It’s the correct sum. How much have you done this month?

Zh: It’s too little! What the hell is this?

Z: How many pieces have you done? I know how many shall I tell you?

Zh: Don’t tell me how many pieces I’ve done! I know how many! You’re cheating me out of my money again!

Z: Oh stop it already, I can’t go through this every month.

Zh: Yeah just walk away again. I'm talking to you don't run away! You think I'm stupid? Do you think I don't know what's going on here? I see things here! I know what's going on.

Z: Oh shut up, I've had enough of you!

Zh: There's a *gazda* here! There's a *gazda*! I'm going to ask him to come down here and tell him everything!

Z: Go and ask him! Go! I'm not stopping you!

Zh: Go fuck yourself! I'm going to the *gazda*! You think I don't know what's going on here? I see things every day!

Z: Enough already! I'm sick of you! Every damn month! Start looking for another job! That's it, I'm telling you, start looking for another job!

Mr Zeko walked away and continued handing out payslips while Zhare stayed behind mumbling to himself. Jasna, Ruzha, Kocho and myself just looked at each other and giggled. None of the other workers expressed any statements of solidarity with Zhare or support for his behaviour, even though, in principle, they agreed that everyone's worth as a labourer, including Zhare's, was being undervalued. Mitko's advice to him after the scene was hardly encouraging: "Zhare if you decided to work in this industry you have to accept that this is it." Others saw his exasperation as a comic display of his incapacity to master the required social artistry for producing social relations with his superiors in order to gain concessions. Even before the event Jasna would jokingly say "Get ready for the Zhare show!" as soon as she could spot Mr Zeko handing out payslips. Mechev saw it as nothing more than hot air: "He's just barking like a mad dog for nothing. You'll see, he'll have a go at Zeko now and in a few days it will be as if nothing had happened. He just keeps threatening him but never does anything. You think he has the courage to go upstairs?" Mechev even felt sorry for Mr Zeko because word might get

around that his workers are openly disrespecting him.

True enough, the peculiar thing about these monthly confrontations was that nothing happened afterwards. Zhare would neither go to the *gazda* nor look for other jobs and I could not notice any difference in his relation to Mr Zeko, despite his vitriolic verbal attacks. Most of the people in the cutting section who witnessed these regular outbursts, speculated that the only reason Zhare had not been fired already was that Mr Zeko felt sorry for him and knew that “no one else would hire him with a big mouth like that”. Somewhat paradoxically then, the effect of Zhare’ public confrontations with Mr Zeko regarding what he saw as wage theft, appears twofold: firstly, it reaffirms the perceived power differentials between workers and their superiors and secondly, it opens up the possibility that there could be more than just impersonal exchange of labour for cash going on behind the transaction on payday. There could just as well be empathy with the socially vulnerable other predicated on the existence of an imagined moral community, governed by principles of redistribution and mutual benefit. The end result is both a revitalized political imagination that longs for an “alternative moral order” (Berdahl 2010: 47) and a deferral of political agency to immediate superiors.

8.5.1 Projecting Forwards: the Ideal “West”

I will try to illustrate this by reference to a few more examples. Much of the above said can be discerned from a conversation I had with Prasho on the shop floor. We were busy trimming cuffs and discussing the usual hardships of working in the garment industry. At some point I asked him whether he thought things would get better in the garment industry in the near future and his response was a resounding “No!” According to him, things “would not get better in the next fifty years or so.” Even more, he

asserted that “The only way for things to improve here is if someone from outside comes and takes over everything. We just don’t have the capacity.” According to this logic the only way for the overall economic situation to improve would be to reduce the country to the status of a virtual protectorate, run by capable “outsiders”. These outsiders are invariably located in the developed “West”, usually meaning Western Europe and the USA. The choice is not accidental given that in Macedonia the “West” stands for an imagined community of abundance, a moral economy of cooperation and order where everyone profits (see Neofotistos 2008: 21). In contrast, the lived reality of life in Macedonia is experienced as the very opposite. In Macedonia, according to Prasho: “People are mean and don’t know how to cooperate. Take this table for example. It’s loaded with work and Badev hasn’t been able to catch up and we’re running out of space to work on. But none of the cutters on the other two tables want to come and help out.” I suggested that this has nothing to do with the moral character of the other cutters and that the absence of cooperation was caused by the piece rate system. Prasho however, insisted that “that’s not the only reason. They just don’t like each other like many others here.”

Prasho’s interpretation reveals some of the contradictions between the daily realities the of piece rate payment system that stimulates competition and the imagined moral community that transcends petty self-interest. Economic competition introduced through the piece rate payment system creates a conflict between “aspirations” to behave ethically with others (*perform* the moral self) and “real probabilities” (to sabotage one-another), that despite itself did not of necessity render the former “unthinkable” nor the latter “virtuous” (see Bourdieu 1977: 77). On the one hand it was no great secret that there was an economic motive involved. Mandana *did* try to take some work from Badev’s table which led to a bitter quarrel after which Mandana

withdrew. The problem however was not that Mandana tried to “steal” from Badev, but the externally imposed social context which prevented them from cooperating instead of competing, thus souring their relationship. In other words, competition is not so much seen as “economically healthy” but as socially and morally “ill”.

Creating a system that promotes actions that are motivated by the drive for pure monetary gain is tantamount to encouraging persons to reach the lowest depths of moral decrepitude. Yet this is precisely what workers were encouraged to do through the piece rate payment system. Unsurprisingly, time and again I heard workers complaining that what bothered them the most about the factory was the poor interpersonal relations (*megjuchovechki odnosi*) on the shop floor. The problem however was never seen to arise from the piece rate payment system as such but from the absence of *good management* whose specific responsibility it was to prevent the deterioration of interpersonal relations. In fact, when I suggested to Prasho that things could perhaps improve if workers had an equal say in how to run the factory he rejected the idea as outright unworkable:

Prasho: But you can't not have a hierarchy. Then you have an anarchy and it's going to be total chaos. We need to have someone in charge and managing things. I mean I don't mind the way the factory is organised *I just don't think the right people are in the right place*. Take Mr Samorich for example. What does he know about managing people? He's the technical director and he should be in charge of all the technical aspects of production. But you need to have an altogether different mentality for managing people and human relations [*megjuchovechki odnosi*]. You need someone who knows more about that. I mean there are people who go to university and get degrees precisely for that kind of work. None of them [higher management] know how to handle those things. They just don't have the sense for people management. I think if the *gazda* knew these things he would place someone else in charge of that.

Me: Do you think the owner has the same criteria as you do for what makes a good manager?

Prasho: Well probably not. I'm sure that he's happy with Mr Samorich as long as he can see the profits coming in every month. *But I think that if people were better managed here the company would make even more money and everyone would be happier.*

Once again, it is possible to argue that in his narrative Prasho clearly “misrecognizes” or confuses the problem, which, instead of being located in the very structure of economic relations (the economic “base”), becomes purely moral, or a question of poor and unethical communal relations. In this depoliticised version, (where one can easily recognize the myth of CSR) capitalism can “deliver for everyone” and restore moral balance. However, for Prasho the very distinction between economic and moral would not make a whole lot of sense since they are really two sides of the same coin. The phrase “business is business” holds very little currency on the shop floor and is tantamount to saying to someone that one would just as soon have nothing to do with them, or that one is unwilling to recognize their person in their social “fullness”. Pure business equals bad human relations and moral depravity which by definition equals a bad economy. Consequently, the value placed on “good relations” is really not about the effective management of “human resources” but about the creation of a specific moral economy where both owners and workers partake of the same imagined community where “everyone would be happier.” To achieve such harmony though would require a set of resources (knowledge, skill, abilities), or the kind of capital possessed by elites that is simply beyond the reach of workers.

8.5.2 Projecting Backwards: Socialist Utopia

Grigoriy made this amply clear when praising the old system. He summed it up thus (whilst fine trimming pieces of cloth on the bandsaw):

“Do you know where the idea of communism came from? The bees. You know what their system was? One commands everyone else works. That's how it was here. We had one person in command and everyone else working.” “Is that a good thing?” I asked. “Of course” he said. “Can I be in command? We can't all be in charge. Then you get the *bashibozuk* that have now. Everyone is in command.”

Bashibozuk is a Turkish words still active in colloquial Macedonian that workers often use to describe the “transition”. It literally means “damaged-head” and was introduced by the Ottomans who used it to refer to army-irregulars or paramilitaries. *Bashibozuk* troops were among the most feared during the twilight years of the Ottoman Empire, particularly following the onset of revolutionary nationalism in the Balkans. They often accompanied the Imperial army (*Asker*) in their efforts to quell nationalist uprisings and in return were left to plunder the towns and villages that offered support to rebels (see Brown 2003: 71). Over time, the term has come to signify “chaos” and “disorder” or a kind of “free-for-all”, the underlying theme being that “there is no one in control.” As an interpretive term it is commonly used by many workers who came of age during socialism and aptly captures their experience of neoliberal democracy as a kind of officially sanctioned “looting” of the weak; and the complete breakdown of the moral order where the new capitalists, much like marauding irregulars, have no interest in forming lasting relations with their victims (cf Graeber 2011b: 109). Grigoriy continued:

“Back then there were institutions. If the institute of agriculture said ‘We need to plant this seed!’ it was known [accepted by everyone] that it suits the conditions and that it is

the most profitable crop. Now they [private entrepreneurs] all do as they please. Back then we used to produce everything. This type of work [holds out the fabric in his hands] is easy to organize. You get the materials and the designs and everything else. That's not production. Production is to get your own raw materials, design everything, produce it and sell it. That's production. That's what we had in Yugoslavia. We produced everything from trains to planes. One was in command and we all worked. And we worked well and lived well. Everyone was buying cars and building houses and going on holidays. Now we just scrape by, day by day. That's what you get when everyone wants to be in charge.”

Grigoriy represents the problem at a much wider scale. For him the main issue is not in the immediate management of the factory but in the peripheral position of the Macedonian garment industry in relation to the capitalist core. Yugoslavia is portrayed as a self-contained system governed by a moral economy of mutual obligations where both workers and managers (planners) benefit from production. In a way, the model is that of a closed-circuit, household economy of use-values, where the production of commodities serves to satisfy the needs of producers. In contrast, the current model emphasizes the pure production of exchange values that subsumes and commoditizes the producers themselves (see Taussig 2010: 29). Factories receive all the necessary materials which are to be assembled according to design and shipped out. Both systems follow a clear chain of command. In the new economy though, workers are nothing more than outsourced labourers who are morally and socially disconnected from the wider system of production. As soon as their labour is remunerated at the agreed price the relation is terminated. Exchange in this case implies equality (“we are all individuals freely exchanging our properties”) but also separation (Graeber 2011: 122). The people in charge are far away in countries like Germany and Switzerland and are as oblivious to the social realities of direct producers as are the *gazdi*. An exchange value economy is thus directly related to the widely perceived degeneration of social bonds of solidarity

and mutual dependence (producing to sell without any consideration of the socially defined “needs” of producers).

Conversely, fostering solidarity and restoring order becomes homologous with reinstating the authority of a centralized redistributive system (central planners, *gazdi* or simply the state). Grigoriy in fact sometimes spoke of socialism as a kind of potlatch society. Once during the break he made a performative comment that once “There was a time when people would just give out of *merak*! Now they just grab!” *Merak* is yet another Turkish expression that embraces a plurality of meanings such as “desire”, “pleasure” or “hedonism.” To “have *merak*” for something means to desire something. To do something “out of *merak*” is to do it for the sheer sake of pleasure and without calculation. To give something “out of *merak*” then is to obtain pleasure from the very act of giving - to project the self in relation to others through an act of generosity that entices some form of recognition from the recipients. Giving gifts of course always generates some kind of enduring and usually hierarchical relation between giver and recipient by weaving webs of mutual indebtedness. Socialist redistribution, imagined here as a kind of ritualized celebration of abundance, is here deployed as a symbol of everything that a market economy of exchange values is not.

8.6 Concluding remarks:

The differences in Prasho’s and Grigoriy’s narratives reflect their generational and class distinctions. Grigoriy grew up in Yugoslavia in a working class family of peasant origins and first started working in the garment industry in the late seventies just after finishing high-school. Prasho on the other hand, grew up in a well-educated middle class family and had himself spent some time studying abroad. He came of age in the

crisis years of the late eighties and early nineties when the libertarian anti-communist rhetoric was at its zenith in Macedonia. If Grigoriy eulogized Yugoslav socialism, Prasho saw it as a totalitarian nightmare and compared it to Orwell's 1984 society and sometimes referred to it as "feudalism". This did not make him less critical of the current economic system as deeply flawed and immoral nor from imagining a better alternative order.

Mitko, who is the same generation as Prasho, also liked to blame the current state of depravity on the economic failing of socialism and insisted that only the free play of supply and demand could guarantee a healthy economy. At the same time however he was able to express his admiration for the 'moral values of socialism' such as mutual care, generosity and equity. "We need to fill this hole now and that's why I think religion is important" he said, referring to the rediscovered national prestige of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. Jasna, who was equally tired of her mother's incessant laments about the loss of Makedonka, would often speak about the moral depravity prevailing in Shtip today, whether sexual, material or spiritual. If Grigoriy located his utopia in a lost Yugoslav past, Prasho projected it into the distant future, modelled on an idealized "Western capitalism" where common prosperity is the norm and "human relations" take precedence over the profit motive. To borrow from Levi-Strauss, we can say that both narratives are therefore similar *in their differences* with the neoliberal economic model that recognizes them as labour-commodities. This similarity allows both Grigoriy and Prasho to recognize each other *in their longing* for an alternative world as moral persons, and maintain that space which would allow for social relations to operate beyond the narrow confines of self-interested competition.

For example, in one of the many discussions about the differences between Yugoslavia and Macedonia, Rodna spoke nostalgically of Tito's Yugoslavia as a place where

“people knew how to help one another and lived well.” With a heavy dose of sarcasm, Ruzha said: “Yeah but now we have things like freedom and democracy”. To this Rodna replied without humour: “Fuck this democracy that leaves you without a dime in your pocket.” This remark was something no one found objectionable. Much like in other post-socialist countries (see Ghodsee 2015: xv), workers in Macedonia make no conceptual difference between “democracy” and “free market capitalism”. They are often both referred to as “pluralism” and symbolize experiences of political chaos and economic free-for-all perpetrated by greedy, asocial, “autonomous” individuals. “Tito Yugoslavia” is symbolically reconstructed out of these experiences and stands as their inverted mirror image. It has become for many a moral community of stability, order, equity, mutuality and interdependence. It celebrates the embedded person and structures the political imagination around more equitable forms of dependence and “social inequality”.

Following Gregory we may say these oppositions revolve around the antagonistic contrast between relations of “reciprocal dependence” and “reciprocal independence” (1982: 42). Gregory uses the distinction to define a continuum on which objects in exchange graduate from gifts to commodities and back. Gift exchange underscores a “reciprocal dependence” between parties who are bound together by rights and mutual obligations whereas commodity exchange underscores the “reciprocal independence” of transactors who are “strangers, aliens” to each other (ibid). The contrast is meant to tease out the distinction between the economies of capitalist and pre-capitalist societies. But the point I wish to stress is that in contemporary Macedonia one finds both forms of reciprocity present at one and the same. On the one hand we have balance, equivalence and solidarity, and on the other hand, competition, atomism and individualism (cf. Stirrat 1989: 101), neither of which is averse to the emergence of hierarchical

distinctions between individuals or classes (however defined). The tension between the two then consists in the specific kind of hierarchical relationship each generates and the specific understanding of the self it rests upon.

We can identify in the desire for a “utopian” moral community where “everyone is better off” is an imaginary totality of social relations (and totalities are always imaginary objects) in which the individual-relational self can be realized (cf Graeber 2007: 63). The question is how does such a form of selfhood maintain itself in an economic environment objectively dominated by exchange value in which social experience becomes a field of disjuncture, filled with contradictions and “resistant to univocal interpretation” (Dews 1987: 225)? The disjointed self inhabits this liminal space between a past that is forever lost and a future that seems perpetually postponed. Active critique follows passive resignation, relations with others toe the line between solidarity and competition and the utopian imagination is trampled on daily by the systemic features and realities of contemporary garment production (flexible labour, piece-rate wages, just-in-time-production etc.). Performing the self in such a context is necessarily beset by pitfalls, negotiations, compromises and demands a continuous effort of patching-up. Also, insofar as it seeks recognition from the other, the process always carries the risk of “destroying that social relation, or turning it into some kind of terrible conflict” (Graeber 2007: 64), whenever the required social artistry is lacking (as in the case of Zhare for example).

But is precisely in the open-endedness of liminality that we can move away from the closed circuit of the habitus and enter the historical process, rife with contradictions and opposing tendencies that may or may not crystallize identity along class lines. We see that workers and *gazdi* already recognize each other as two distinct sorts of people, and that these differences are not just assumed but continuously constructed and performed

through everyday practices of joking and avoidance. Moreover, we see that this distinction is not just cultural but is closely linked to the different ways in which both groups relate to the market. We might therefore concede that this process contains the seeds and makings of new class identities, if we approach class in Thompson's terms as a fleeting social and cultural formation that receives its shape only in relation to other classes (see Ch. I). It is clear that as long as this relationship takes place in the context of precarious and underdeveloped labour markets where the possibility of abjection is never far removed from sight, its transformation along politically antagonistic lines is far from a foregone conclusion. Escape from abjection and the struggle for recognition is far more likely to be sought through existing structures of power and inequality rather than in collision with them (Foucault). Visions of future hopes often regurgitate the calling for the welfare state and are infused with notions of patriarchy, authority and domination that for the most part remain unchallenged.

But we nonetheless must remain attentive to the way people orient themselves and act in ways that surpass that which is most immanent to their world, and resist the assumption that such ideologies can only ever exist as the rusty cogs in the otherwise smooth machinery that reproduces exploitation and abjection (Robbins 2013: 457). People in Shtip may find the present to be absurd and filled with overwhelming forces beyond their control, but this is also a world filled with imaginative human efforts to charge it with meanings and values that ensure that structures of alienation and abjection are not the only game in town. Even when workers remain subjected, they refuse to lose sight of the human relations that constitute their subjection and their malleability.

Chapter IX: Conclusion

9.1 Summary of Chapters:

This thesis started with a number of exploratory questions that sought to expand our anthropological understanding of everyday life in Macedonia, by moving away from the traditional centre ground of ethno-national identity politics. I specifically suggested that a focus on changing labour regimes and economic practices, might provide some fruitful insights into how shifting concepts of class and personhood have been shaping people's lives, their cultural values and sense of self. I suggested that these need to be analysed in their transformative, historical dimension and through the dialectic between praxis and the imagination, or, to put it Marxist terms, between social being and social consciousness.

In Chapter I, I introduced the theoretical concepts of class, culture and personhood, in relation to the operations of power and the making of subjectivities that correspond to specific economic regimes. I stressed the inseparability of the economic from the social and the cultural, and the ability of workers to challenge dominant ideologies and subject categories. This was an important first step in the analysis of the neoliberal transition and the remaking of labour, where I explore the tensions and wider implications generated by the privatization process and the introduction of new labour regimes. I suggested that these tensions are less informed by class antagonisms and more by conflicting models of personhood.

In Chapter II I outlined the key characteristics of the ethnographic method of data collection, which, along with the historical research, have acted as the main sources of information on which my analysis rests. In particular I highlighted the importance of long term participant observation and embodied forms of learning in the field. This

approach is indispensable for obtaining the required levels of social intimacy, through which the anthropologist can begin to develop a sense of the shared and historically fluctuating cultural meanings that motivate social action.

In Chapter III I explored the historical making of an industrial working class in Macedonia, within the context of socialist Yugoslavia. I outlined the formation of Macedonia as a country within Yugoslavia and the emergence and development of self-management as the crowning “achievement” of Yugoslav socialism. My analysis of the official ideology and praxis of self-management was meant to help us understand its impact on how the category of the economic was shaped throughout these years, and how labourers came to see themselves in relation to the wider social and economic environment. My suggestion was that the true force of self-management was not to enable some sort of grass roots workers’ democracy, as its official ideology proclaimed, nor was it to merely control labour through ideological indoctrination. Its main effect was to establish a fleeting hierarchy of interdependencies between workers, technocrats and Party officials, based on a political economy of redistribution and the satisfaction of substantive human needs, as Polanyi would say. In other words, self-management can be seen as the making of a particular “moral economy” that carried with it a specific understanding of personhood, where people experienced (and valued) themselves as embedded “nodes in systems of relationships” (Ferguson 2013), rather than as monadic, autonomous, individuals. I suggested that this conceptualization of the person became increasingly difficult to accommodate in the terrain of the neoliberal market-society and the newly emphasized glorification of the “possessive individual” (McPherson 1962).

This is not to say that market rationality was completely absent during the socialist period. On the contrary, a certain commitment to liberal market principles always formed part of the dynamics of Yugoslav socialism (Mencinger 2000). Managers were,

for the greater part of Yugoslavia's "market socialism" in a tense relationship with political structures (local, republican and federal authorities), due to their middle-of-the-road position. On the one hand they were expected to rely on markets and run enterprises "rationally" and efficiently, but not for the purposes of accumulating profits as an end in itself. These were only the means for ensuring the social and political imperatives of self-management, i.e. rising living standards for the working population and legitimacy for the political order. This double commitment was always at the centre of internal Yugoslav debates between the liberal "pragmatists" and socialist "idealists", about, what were often seen as, the conflictive priorities of market regulation and democratic planning (self-management). The liberals had their limited ascendancy in the 60's which saw a great rise in productivity as well as economic inequalities, which facilitated the turn towards greater "workers' control" in the seventies. The economic downturn and piling foreign debt problem that began to spiral out of control in the eighties, put the debate back on the agenda. By 1989 the arguments of liberal pragmatists, (backed up by the very influential position of the IMF at that stage), that managers must have full rights to hire and fire and complete control over the production process, took the upper hand. This marked the rise of a new dominant narrative that framed economic failure as the logical and inevitable outcome of too much meddling from workers and governments and too little power in the hands of managers to follow market cues. It was, for obvious reasons, almost fully endorsed by the managerial elite who were later on to become some of the most prominent proponents of "market ideology" that did much to legitimize their own ascendancy during the privatization era.

Chapter IV looked at the process of transformation at a macro level and analyzed some of the structural causes behind the decline of the socialist economy, and the particular reverberations this had in the garment sector. From there I proceeded to look at the

specifics of the process of “privatization” of socially owned enterprises. I looked at the recalibration of the role of the state, and its increasing exposure to the dynamics and dictates of local and international capital. The purpose of this chapter was not just to provide a list of the legal and economic changes that took place, but also to point out the kinds of symbolic and conceptual shifts that accompanied this transformation, or to look at “privatisation” as “an object of investigation saturated with ideological significance” (Verdery 1996: 10). I looked at the process of deindustrialization and total economic decline in parallel with the practical and symbolic unmaking of the socialist working class as a precondition for the ideological overhaul of the Macedonian state and society. This was an important precondition for the introduction of a neoliberal market based model and the separation, or disembedding, of economic activity from the moral concerns of socialist planners and the socio-economic needs of workers. However, I do not treat neoliberalism as a repressive totalizing force, but as a productive site for debating the conduct of new and old subjects that always includes a plurality of voices.

My analysis suggests that the ideal neoliberal model is never unambiguously materialised in practice. The privatization process itself had very little to do with “market rationality” and was all the way shot through with politics and all sorts of improvisation (cf Verdery 1996: 211). This is also seen in the relationship that employers have towards the state and their workers. I showed in chapters V and VI, that it is not uncommon for employers to demand state subsidies for technological modernisation or even for cheapening the price of labour, all the while insisting that wages can only be determined by their market value when in dialogue with workers. There I wrote about the strategic use of market rationality, before moving this debate to the factory where much the same occurs. In other words, the discourse of market rationality, individuality and objectivism is merely there to facilitate management's

political control over the workplace by legitimizing their authority as the "experts" and inhibiting the emergence of shop floor resistance. In this sense, I am very much in line with Harvey when he writes that neoliberalism has been far less effective in "revitalizing capital accumulation", and far more effective in the creation of new elites, at least as far as Macedonia is concerned (2005: 19).

But the process of maintaining the legitimacy of elites in the face of dismal economic results, endemic precarity and deindustrialization, has not simply produced widespread "consent". Drawing on Turner (1966), I suggested that the transition off workers from one social position to another has remained an open ended and questionable process. The social and cultural transition to capitalism has left many workers to occupy an abject liminal position, as an unnecessary "surplus" in relation to capital. On the one hand, liminality has been disempowering, but on the other hand it has allowed people to question the legitimacy of the autonomous "possessive individual". I highlighted the lingering presence of a socialist moral economy and the notion of embedded personhood; or, as I sometimes refer to it, the lingering presence at the imaginative level of a "moral community" of mutually dependent unequals. This imagination is not simply "inherited" but renewed and remade in the light of new contexts and challenges, not least through the performative uses of language, among other things.

Chapters V and VI focused on these various manifestations of refusal by workers to participate in the new economy, and the struggles to incorporate yesterday's socialist workforce into the emerging private assembly lines. This includes, among other things, a collective, if unorganized, strategy by workers to impose their own definition or ideology of what work ought to be about in order to pressurize both the state and employers, and engage the interests of the wider moral community of the nation. The analysis drew on Austin's conception of performative speech, or the ways in which

narrative exchanges and utterances are involved in the creation of this moral community. Departing from Althusser, I analysed the uses of language and the shaping of a counter-ideology by placing limits on what kinds of economic behaviour is and is not morally acceptable. By paying close attention to how performative utterances were deployed and dispersed in the local community and the media I looked at the ways in which workers imposed their own definitions of the context, without assuming the existence of a widely shared consensus.

My analysis in chapters VII and VIII engaged with the complexity of ethnographic data, in order to explore both the limits and possibilities of shopfloor-control in a context where consent to neoliberal doxa is, in a very real sense, lacking. In the factory, I specifically isolate two important factors: 1) class, not as a strict economic category, but in Bourdieu's sense as a marker of distinction that includes cultural, economic and social factors (i.e. different forms of "capital"); and 2) personhood as the focus of struggles over what kinds of inequality or forms of dependence can be valued as morally legitimate. I looked at all these dimensions in their processual and performative aspects; with clear, albeit non-linear, historical trajectories, but also, as open-ended socio-cultural formations in the making.

In Chapter VII, when looking at the technological division of labour and the relations in production, I mostly engaged in a dialogue with Braverman and Burawoy. I paid particular attention to the question of social alienation in the factory by looking at shifts in the internal division of labour and the separation of conception from execution. I try to argue that the production process, albeit an important factor, is in itself neither determining nor autonomous from the kinds of values and social relations that thrive on the shop floor. Against Braverman, I suggest that deskilling is not necessarily the logical result of separating conception from execution, and against Burawoy, I suggest

that the introduction of piece rates does not necessarily lead to mutual competition and a self-regulated increase in productivity on the shop floor. This does not mean that the organization of production is not without its “effects”. For example, in the last chapter, I look at the ways in which social relations in production are complicit in the creation of class identities and how the workplace becomes the site for competing notions of personhood, which in turn are traced back to the wider changes in the political economy.

I suggested that through everyday practices of joking and avoidance we can identify the manner in which new class distinctions are embodied, performed, reproduced and ultimately normalized in the workplace. Whereas joking has the potential for reducing social distance, we have to pay attention to its opposite side, i.e. avoidance, where the limitations of when and with whom one can engage in such kind of playful behaviour begin to emerge. In other words, whereas some hierarchies succumb to joking, others remain out of reach. But I have also been careful not to look at hierarchies as static, given categories. Avoidance also has to be constructed and maintained through the continuous social performance of cultural separation and exclusion. This allows economic elites to strategically manipulate the social connections and disconnections at the workplace. This is done by alternating between two models of the workplace: a small scale impersonal market society, populated by “possessive individuals” who “freely” exchange their labour for cash; and an embedded model of the moral community, criss-crossed by a hierarchies of mutuality and interdependence.

But, in maintaining this ambivalence, elites continuously expose the socially constructed (arbitrary) quality of the arrangement and thereby undermine the possibility of fully reifying or naturalizing their social position (Rofel 1999: 254). Social arrangements become recognized as contingencies, which in turn allows for alternatives

to be not only imagined but acted out in practice (ibid: 187; Osella and Osella 1998: 203). Workers never tire of pointing out that whatever ills befall them, they are always the result of human action, and that it is on other humans that they must operate in order to secure change. Their responses and actions in the face of marketization and privatization, fail to internalize the normative categories of neoliberal rationality, particularly the emphasis on the autonomous, choosing, maximizing subject and self-regulating markets. To workers, their lives and selves appear even more regulated and markets seem anything but free. On the contrary, they are very visibly dominated by the interests of the powerful. Economic activity is not seen as a self-regulating invisible system, but as the result of specific human actions. This was, of course, also characteristic of socialism and is nothing new in itself. What is becoming increasingly invisible, however, are the people behind those actions. In other words, what has been changing, or even disappearing, is the *social* relationship between dominated and dominant.

9.2 Alienation or Embedded Exploitation?

This leads us to an important question regarding the relation between knowledge (awareness) and exploitation, and I have had some difficulty approaching it. I do not, and feel cannot, make a straightforward claim that exploitation in the factory “bypasses” worker consciousness. On the contrary, it is a constant topic of discussion, producing a fountain of commentaries on injustice and moral degradation, not just in the factory but in Macedonian society at large. As I showed in chapters V and VI, talk of exploitation is endemic and in its various guises acts as a language with a performative force that seeks to give visibility to the industrial labour force and situate it within the larger moral community of, for example, the nation. Talking about exploitation does not just seek to

construct a certain understanding of the self in relation to others, but forms an attempt to shape the social and moral context in which economic activity should take place; or as Thompson might have it, to give voice to the moral economy of the abjected and conflate their interests with those of the larger “society”. Additionally, critiques of exploitation in the factory often took the explicit form of a labour theory of value, where workers calculate the amount of value-profits extracted via surplus labour, after accounting for wage expenses. Exploitation is thus not seen as a mystery but as a very salient and profoundly negative fact of life arising from a perceived structural arrangement that channels and limits the responsibility of the dominant towards workers via asocial market mechanisms.

If I were to speak of “mystification” I would have to trace it to the embedded conviction shared by nearly all my informants that it is always possible (preferable even) for elites “to rule without, but not against, the working class” (Schierup 1992: 90), in a benign sort of hierarchy. The yearnings of workers in Macedonia are, in a sense, Durkheimian rather than Marxist, with a more firmly expressed longing for “organic solidarity” rather than “class confrontation”. Talk of “revolution” and class politics, albeit common, is never about achieving autonomy and establishing total control and ownership over the means of production. Rather, it is about creating a particular relationship between workers and elites (managers, politicians etc.) underscored by their common participation in an imagined moral community where everyone's social and economic needs are accounted for. In other words, social inequality is not just seen as more desirable than asocial inequality, but as the ultimate good that cannot itself be surpassed. As Prasho and Grigoriy put it, “someone has to be in charge.” The only question is *who* and in what kind of relation to those she is in charge of. It is here that

workers cede the political ground that in turn allows for the reproduction of exploitation, precarity and alienated elites.

But this is not quite the same kind of intervention by management that Burawoy identifies in the logic of “making out”. Workers do not end up voluntarily increasing their output as a result, because competition, when it occurs, is not explicitly about “work”, but over social relationships. I am not suggesting that social relationships are an end in themselves, or that they are, as Strathern writes in the case of Melanesia “the *objects* of people’s dealings with one another”, or that they can only be translated into (or *exchanged* for) “other social relations” (1988: 172; my emphasis). Clearly in our case, social relations are convertible into (or find their effects in) the production, consumption and distribution of things and vice versa. For workers, work is valuable only insofar as it is constitutive of, and constituted in, a particular system of social and moral relations, and the latter only insofar as they can be translated into a “fairer” distribution of goods and resources. This, in turn, reproduces more valuable or “better” social (and moral) relations, that, albeit tainted by hierarchy and inequality, are able to accommodate their social and moral needs, and uphold the value and integrity of the embedded person. What I am saying, then, is that the production of things can never be separated from the production of social relations (i.e. the production of persons), and that insofar as this is explicitly recognized by workers, we cannot speak of alienation in the strictest sense of the word.

9.3 Class, Personhood, and the Politics of Dependence

There is little doubt in the refusal of workers to absorb and respond to the “possessive individual”, as the dominant subject category of the neoliberal creed. This has certainly

imposed some constraints on the manner in which the neoliberal turn (both as “governmentality” and market liberalization) has unfolded in Macedonia. But I do not wish to eulogize, as Dunn does in the case of Poland, the practices of Macedonia workers as a “model for” effective “resistance” that can inspire others around the world (Dunn 2004: 164). Ferguson (2013) treats such “declarations of dependence”, or efforts to reshape the contours of inequality and hierarchy in a more “social” way, with a justified dose of ambiguity. He suggests that we should recognize their value as limited, pragmatic attempts to address (in the medium term) some of the more deleterious effects of contemporary capitalism (i.e. social abjection and material deprivation), whilst recognizing that they do very little to alter local and global structures of economic inequality in the long term.

Here I agree with Ferguson, as long as we do not lose track of the real danger that strategies of dependence can lead to a new kind of “economic hegemonic culture” where classes become bound by a common, if often uncomfortable, project of “making capitalism work” (Narotzky 1997: 221), that ideologically obscures and materially reproduces systems of exploitation. This is aptly demonstrated in the material presented in this thesis. We see the ways in which new class divisions and distinctions are being generated and reproduced in the workplace and beyond, which allow dominant others (the state, new capitalist elites) to give some breathing space to the embedded dividual through various forms of clientelism and patronage, whilst simultaneously undermining the legal and institutional position of labour. In other words, we may well envisage a point where the “selective hegemony” of neoliberal capitalism becomes parasitic on the very forms of sociality and webs of mutuality that seek to challenge it. Some numbers certainly seem to vindicate this claim. As left wing activists have been pointing out recently, Macedonia has the highest, and continuously growing, levels of economic

inequality in Europe, measured by the country's Gini coefficient movements (Jovanovikj 2015). Soaring profits for the 1% are contrasted with stagnating or declining wages for the general population (ibid). Such data suggests that we ought not to place too much faith in the spontaneous reaction of "society" to protect itself against the invasion of "the market", as a closed Polanyian reading might suggest.

But that does not mean that strategies of dependence are to be dismissed out of hand. It is for example, a common assertion in everyday political discussions in Macedonia (and the wider region), that the working classes suffer from a kind of "servile mentality" (*podanichki mentalitet*). This is usually attributed to centuries of Ottoman, but also communist rule, where top-down domination was supposedly the norm. As the story goes, this produced an endemic population of complacent sycophants, whose warped psychology now stands as the chief impediment to progress and modernity. It is striking how this view represents one of the few common meeting points of both market apologists and left wing activists. Whereas the former decry the lingering attachment to "the nanny state" and the lack of free entrepreneurial spirits, the latter bemoan the clientelistic "passivity" of the working classes, who look to others for help, instead of helping themselves. Dependency is the common enemy, though of course, different political commitments emerge from this conclusion: individual entrepreneurialism versus class revolt. Neither of these entertain the possibility that dependency can be an *agentive* response to the precarity introduced by marketization, in the absence of conditions that might permit, for example, class based forms of solidarity and political strategy. Such a view does not presuppose that free markets are "hindered" by dependent persons, (they can in fact be an indirect by-product of disinterested "selective" markets), nor that dependency is an inherently "passive" game that plays right into the hands of the dominant. On the contrary, one can easily imagine, as in the

case of the *stechajci* for example, people in open revolt against what they see as economic and moral injustice, *and* in pursuit of ties of dependency that position them on the lower scales of the hierarchy. We should, perhaps, avoid dismissing their struggle out of hand, simply because it was not explicitly class based, as if there could ever be a straightforward link between one's position in the relations of production and group identity and political activity.

If political activism and the struggle against economic exploitation is to mean anything in Macedonia today, we need a better understanding of the "common sense" of the very people whose experiences and practices are most directly shaped by their exposure to precarious labour regimes (Gramsci 1992: 330). We might be surprised, however, to hear that "class", in the standard Marxist sense, is not necessarily the most important or most salient category that defines and guides these experiences and practices. Rather than class solidarity, the struggles and politics of workers are more concerned with re-establishing the larger, hierarchical webs of mutuality and interdependence that sustain and value the embedded person. If we are to "ground" our analysis and make academic critique historically relevant, this also means having a more open approach to these "common sense" pursuits of dependence, instead of discarding them as anachronistic obstacles to "progress" or revolution. This would allow us to ask not only what forms of dependence might be preferable to others (Meth 2004: 23), but also what forms of "autonomy" expose persons to social and economic abjection? We might also end up questioning the "common sense" of emancipatory liberalism and its enduring value-commitment to the "free" monadic individual of market society. My informants' are already way ahead of this thesis when it comes to pursuing these inquiries. I can only hope that this analysis has allowed me to catch up, and lay the foundations for further research in this direction.

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Kanal 5

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